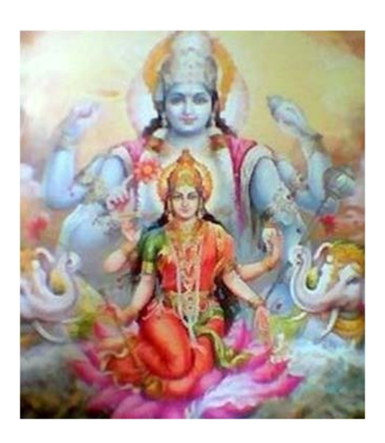
JOURNEY WITH MUHAMMAD



PROPHECY IN ISMAILI GNOSIS

AZIZ TALBANI
PREFACE BY PARVEEN HASANALI



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Journey with Muhammad ﷺ

Prophecy in Ismaili Gnosis

Aziz Talbani, Ph.D.

With a Preface by

Parveen Hasanali, Ph.D.

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The Title Cover shows a 16th century miniature painting by Sultan Muhammad Nur depicting Prophet Muhammad on his steed surrounded by Angels from Nizami's *Khamseh*. It is public domain art and copyright free obtained from Wikipedia.org

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I would like to thank Zawahir Moir for her inspiration and help in completing this book. I would also like to thank The Institute of Ismaili Studies who provided financial support to complete my Masters at McGill University; much of the research for this book began with my Masters' thesis on *Nubuwwah.* Most of all, I would like to thank Professor Parveen Hasanali for reading through the work and providing thoughtful feedback.



PREFACE

Journeys. And Sojourns. They have a life of their own. Sometimes, what seems like a temporary stop, turns out to be much longer! The genesis of a major part of this book by Aziz Talbani began over thirty years ago. Its beginnings correspond to the start of a shared journey, as we toiled day and night reading, writing and researching our respective Masters' thesis and later our PhD dissertations in the computer labs at McGill University, praying to the 24 hour gigantic mainframe computers that transformed our laborious and primitive GML coding into impeccably transliterated printouts in a matter of a few hours usually overnight! What a miracle it was! But enough about the dark ages! I was fortuitous to have been able to uncover and study in Ibn Tufayl's *Hayy ibn Yaqzan,* its important transmissions in many religious and cultural contexts, including its interaction in Ismaili as well as Judaic and Christian milieux. As I continued on my own journey, I often reminded my colleagues at Guilford College where I taught, that the young fiery Quaker George Keith who is said to have written the first pamphlet calling for the abolishment of slavery in North America was also the first translator of *Hayy ibn Yaqzan* into English, which would have impacted the nascent Quaker movement especially with its mystical notions of the *light within*.

Yes, journeys in life take several different turns and unexpected twists, and the journey that this book and its author have taken allowed it to blossom into a much larger enterprise! I give you examples from Ibn Tufayl and

concurrently from Abu Hatim's *A'lām al-Nubuwwah* because of the outreach of these works. These texts help us the readers on our journeys just as when they were written by their creative authors who shared their own journeys with us. The aforementioned works stand out from the many studies in their times due to their original and particular approaches as well as their unique literary genres. There is an explicit intent to communicate, to make sense of, to make known and to create meaning of central, spiritual concepts and ideas in a lived context. These works are cognizant of the audience to which they are addressed and their significance hinges on contributing to the discourse, whether prevalent or alternative. I see those elements in this work by Aziz Talbani by the manner in which it handles issues and concepts that were central to the worldview and understandings of the religious and spiritual universe of the writers whom he tackles.

This study begins with a succinct introduction to the biographical literature on Prophet Muhammad drawn from early sources and highlights shi'ite perspectives that are often ignored in many studies. It frames the presentation on critical perspectives of the knowledge power discourse, whose analyses may be found in several other works by the author in the areas of education and sociology. In many ways, the knowledge power discourse as analyzed by Dr. Talbani forms the impetus of his critical analyses throughout the work. We are exposed to a unique understanding of Prophet Muhammad as a contested discourse within and outside Muslim communities. Furthermore, Dr. Talbani aids us in recognizing the negative repercussions of prevalent western renditions of 'Islam' by contextualizing their precursors in medieval writings by Christian priests that were framed in the beginnings of the 'empire' and culminate in colonial and post-colonial discourses of orientalism. Current, western, normatized presentations of 'Islam' also draw their rooted biases from such medieval propaganda.

This current study reminds us that the debates, not just between the two Razis', but also some of the back and forth views between the various Ismaili philosopher da'is like Nasafi, Sijistani, Kirmani and Razi over minute points in the grand scheme of the Ismaili Da'wah were significant and meaningful because they preserved the path, making sure it remained relevant. Whether the period was one in which its teachings were hidden, or whether it was revealed, the role of the da'is and pirs was to preserve the path and to keep its ta'wīlī and spiritual underpinnings vital and alive. Likewise, we see the blossoming of Ismaili literature in some of the most turbulent periods in which the heartfelt, poetic ta'wīlī works of Nasir Khusraw were composed, as well as the sophisticated, structured discourses by Nasir al-Din Tusi were written. It is the conversations we have with these texts, recognizing their contexts and gladly recognizing our own biases towards them, whether positive or negative, while valuing their contributions to our thinking, that make them meaningful. Our task then is not just to produce and preserve the texts of the past but to make them alive and exciting both for ourselves and for our students. It means writing with a certain honesty, preserving and valuing diverse voices and styles, to produce works that are vital, and most of all, readable.

It is a eureka moment when a beautiful metaphor by Sijistani brings to life the inert wood in his complex renditions of Neoplatonic Ismailism, or when Nasir Khusraw makes us revisit our modern biases against hierarchies with his thoughtful analogies of trees and branches and roots to explain the whole interconnectivity of the da'wah.

The ginanic traditions are especially rich and fecund in reminding us of the timeless traditions of the spiritual path and ways in which understandings of Prophet Muhammad can signify this search for the eternal in a period rife with materialism and darkness. Nationalistic movements in India have tended to strain many Ismaili communities of

Khoja origin causing independent schisms that frequently hinge on the very life, livelihood, and survival of its minority members. Furthermore, 21^{st} century globalization alongside the politicized discourses on Islam have contributed to a shared sense of Ismailism, as being representative of the best that the faith has to offer. Consequently, Ginanic literature has frequently become a challenged discourse. One of the greatest contributions that this study has to offer is its ability to forward the significant role that ginans play in recognizing divine guidance encapsulated in Prophet Muhammad. The erudite background of its author that is grounded in the primary sources and understandings of Arabic, Persian, Khojki Sindhi and Indic traditions allow for a nuanced and authentic understanding of the contributions of the ginanic traditions without becoming enmeshed in some of the polemic and ethnocentric understandings. Furthermore, the very survival of ginanic literature as a living literary and spiritual mode of Ismaili ta'wīl might pivot on this ability to step back and see them within the broader frame.

Understanding the roles that the Prophet plays with the Aga Khan III, especially his spiritual underpinnings, and his social ethics with the current Ismaili Imam, the Aga Khan IV, bring the journey with Muhammad to a full circle. The cyclical times will continue, if we are to go by Ismail notions of time, eternity and the journey of the soul! We see in the works of the Aga Khan IV, a celebration and preservation of Islamic traditions and cultures in a contemporary frame, a cosmopolitan, pluralistic ethic, and a pragmatic and humanistic approach to resolving and responding to the needs of a global humanity.

We are all travelers (*sālikūn*) on the path, muddling somewhere in the middle, fondly remembering special beginnings that themselves were sometimes culminating points of lesser cycles. Exploring the concepts of prophecy by these Ismaili thinkers show us a connectedness within very different traditions and the limitedness and at the same time vastness of different notions of continuity and

time, timelessness and eternity. Prophet Muhammad started a journey seeking a better understanding of his own spiritual path. His life and teachings became a model for all Muslims from many diverse cultures and geographical milieux to emulate him. This study provides a comprehensive look at a wide of range of expressions on Prophecy in the history of Ismailism.

Be alive, embrace eternity!
Parveen Hasanali,
February, 2017



Chapter 1

Muhammad ﷺ: Living a Challenging Life

Muhammad was born in the city of Mecca in the Arabian Peninsula in 570 of the Common Era (henceforth CE). His father had passed away about six months before his birth and his single parent mother, Aminah bint Wahab raised him. As patriarch of the Hashimite clan, his grandfather, Abd al-Muttalib, looked after the family. As per the traditions of the time, at the age of 3 or 4 months, a Bedouin wet nurse, Halima, fostered Muhammad to raise him with her family.

Traditions report that he showed signs of being a person with extraordinary abilities early in his life while he was still with his foster mother, Halima. Biographies of the Prophet also record several supernatural events taking place in his life (Lings, 1983). Miracles of his early life include the prosperity that his presence brought to his foster parents. His presence manifested positive change on his immediate environment enhancing life around him. He lived with his foster mother until he was about 6 years old. His foster parents grew concerned about the supernatural events occurring around him and decided to bring him back to his mother (Ibn Hisham, 1961).

His mother Aminah took him to visit Yathrib (later named Medina) where Muhammad's father, Abd-Allah was buried. While returning from Yathrib, Aminah fell ill and passed away. His grandfather, Abd al-Muttalib, became his guardian. However, when he was about 8 years old, his grandfather passed away and his uncle Abu Talib became his guardian (Ibn Ishaq, 1955).

The young Muhammad worked for Abu Talib, first shepherding his flocks and then accompanying him on business travels. It is reported that he went as far as Syria during this period (Lings, 1983). At a young age, he received the titles of *al-Amīn* (the trustworthy) and *al-Ṣādiq* (the truthful) within the community. In the Arab society of the time, titles, respect, and recognition came with age and significant accomplishments. Since Muhammad received these two titles when he was quite young, it indicates that the quiet young man must have accomplished something of significance and demonstrated qualities that made him stand out among the youth of his time. However, we do not find many details on his youth and early life.

When Muhammad was in his early twenties, Khadija bint Khawalayd, a widow and distant cousin, employed him to oversee her business enterprise. Muhammad ran her business profitably. When Muhammad was about 25 years old, she proposed to him. Muhammad accepted her proposal and they got married. It is interesting to note that it was Khadija who proposed to Muhammad. Khadija was an extraordinary person within the traditional tribal society. She ran a flourishing business and had the confidence to propose marriage to Muhammad. She seemed to break tribal traditions and had the vision and foresight to recognize special qualities in Muhammad. Likewise, Muhammad also inspired confidence in others and people of all genders and ages felt comfortable to approach him.

The couple had six children, four girls and two boys, and the latter died in infancy. It must have been a troublesome time for Muhammad and Khadija. Muhammad had seen so much death in his life and the loss of his two sons must have been extremely difficult.

The Beginning of Prophecy

Muhammad began to spend more time alone in meditation, or sometimes accompanied by his first cousin young Ali ibn Abi Talib. He chose a quiet mountain cave, known as Ḥirā’, to spend his time in fasting and meditation. He would retreat to the cave for a month. In 610 CE, when he was about 40 years old, he received a spiritual vision — a revelation (*waḥy*). Muslim traditions report that the archangel Gabriel visited him to deliver a message from Allah. This experience shook him to the core. It was powerful transformative experience. He was scared and did not share this message with anyone other than his wife, Khadija and his cousin, Ali ibn Abi Talib. Both accepted his message and became the first followers of Islam. Muhammad went through a period of agony and self-doubt when he did not receive any other messages for a while. He felt that Allah had abandoned him. Nevertheless, his spouse and cousin stood by him.

Three years later, he received the revelation commanding him to go public. Muhammad was creative in his method of exposing people to his message. He invited his close relatives for a meal. During the gathering, he posed a question to them: “If I told you there is an army behind the mountain waiting to attack you, would you believe me?” They all said, “Yes, we would believe you, because you have never lied to us.” Then, Muhammad proceeded to explain his mission. He invited them to join him in spreading the word of Allah. He promised that whoever supported him would also succeed him. However, they rejected his invitation. Some of them ridiculed him while others thought that he was seeking power or was not

of sound mind. Among the gathering, only his nephew, Ali raised his hand and proclaimed his support for Muhammad and his mission. Muhammad addressed Ali as his successor and announced it to the gathering. The elders in the meeting ridiculed them and doubted their ability to bring about change and succeed in their mission (Lings, 1983).

Gradually, the number of Muhammad's followers increased. As he persisted in spreading his message, opposition from the people of Mecca also intensified. Initially, the Quraysh ridiculed him, then they became antagonistic, and finally, they were outright hostile to him. Meccan aristocracy saw an end to their archaic tribal system in Muhammad's message. They realized that Muhammad was determined and he was gradually assembling followers around him. They offered him wealth, power, and women to persuade him to abandon his mission. Muhammad refused. They approached his uncle, Abu Talib, requesting him to convince Muhammad to abandon his mission. There is a famous report in which Muhammad said to his uncle, "If they place the sun in my right hand and the moon in my left hand, I would not abandon my mission." However, the leaders of Mecca held on to their premise that Muhammad was seeking power. They felt challenged by Muhammad's denial of the divinity of their deities that were over 360 in number and the foci of lucrative pilgrimages to their mercantile regions.

Life became extremely difficult for Muhammad and his small group of followers. They were harassed and tortured. Being a strategic thinker, Muhammad realized that his community could not flourish in such circumstances. He began exploring various options and sent out teams to various regions of Arabia and Africa. In 614-15 CE, a group of Muslims migrated to Abyssinia where they were given protection despite the interventions of the Quraysh to prevent it.

Meccan hostilities continued to increase to the extent that the two major clans of Mecca, Banu Makhzum and Banu Abd Shams, boycotted the clan of Banu Hashim. In 617 CE, they prohibited conducting any business or having social relations such as marriages with Banu Hashim. This very difficult period of the Prophet's life lasted for almost three years. Banu Hashim did not give in to the economic and social pressures. Even though they faced starvation and constant harassment, they continued to protect Muhammad and his small band of followers. After three years, the boycott lost its impact and was lifted.

Muhammad's wife, Khadija and his uncle Abu Talib passed away in the following year, 620 CE. The boycott had taken its emotional and physical toll on both of them. It was an extremely difficult year for Muhammad and he called it "the year of sorrow." After the passing of Abu Talib, Abu Lahab became the head of Banu Hashim. He was hostile to Muhammad and withdrew the clan's protection. It meant that if anyone hurt or killed Muhammad, the clan would not take revenge against them. Hence, it became crucial for Muhammad to find a safe place for himself and his followers to protect them from constant harassment and persecution.

The year 620 CE was important for another reason. In this year, Muhammad had a powerful spiritual experience that is known as *Mi'rāj* (the ascension). The significance of the ascension is second only to the revelation itself. It was an experience that transported Muhammad to Jerusalem and then to heaven where he experienced the direct vision of God. The *Mi'rāj* has become the epitome of the spiritual journey that ends with the vision of Allah. Muslim mystics and sufis have written extensively about its symbolism. They identify the journey with the stations of spiritual ascension. After 1400 years, the *Mi'rāj* continues to inspire mystics. It is a cosmic and spiritual event that opens up troves of inner meanings to seekers on

the spiritual path. Muslims celebrate this event every year and try to follow the spiritual path that Muhammad took.

Migration to Medina

Muhammad was avant-garde in networking. His innovative communication and networking techniques were simple yet very effective. He connected with people and conveyed his message to them in plain and straightforward ways. The Holy Quran was his major tool. Its recitation and message had a powerful impact on people. He recited the Quran and had the ability to reach to the heart of people.

The combination of Muhammad's approachability and his charismatic personality was a sure win with people who were open to listening to his message. He met with people who visited Mecca for trade and business or for the pilgrimage to the Ka'abah. During the annual pilgrimage period, he was particularly active in networking and explaining his mission to people. His quiet and subdued approach was effective.

A perfect opportunity emerged in one such encounter. He met a group of people from Yathrib (Medina). His demeanor and message impressed them, and they conditionally accepted Islam. Muhammad was a pragmatic person; he negotiated terms with them and arranged for his followers to migrate to the city. This was the turning point in his life and for his community.

The Quraysh, who were constantly though unsuccessfully considering ways to stop Muhammad's mission, resorted to the last solution; they developed an assassination plot. They selected individuals from various clans to participate in the plan so that any one group would not be culpable. On hearing about the plot, Muhammad hastened his departure to Medina. That night, his cousin, Ali ibn Abi Talib, took Muhammad's place and slept in his bed, while assassins waited outside the house for an

opportunity to kill Muhammad. Late at night, Muhammad secretly left Mecca with his companion, Abu Bakr.

The people in Medina received Muhammad with great celebrations. He soon became a major player in the local society. The first role that Muhammad played was that of an arbitrator for the people of Medina. He resolved century old quarrels between Arab Jewish, Christian and nascent Muslim tribes among the inhabitants of Medina. He demonstrated his wisdom and administrative skills by drafting an agreement, later known as the Charter of Medina (*Mīthāq al-Madīnah*), that highlighted the rules to govern the social and political life in the city. The Charter of Medina declared that all inhabitant of the city constitute one community (*al-Ummah*), which included Jews, Muslims, and pagans. All shared equal rights and responsibilities toward each other and toward the maintenance of peace in the city. All groups had the freedom to practice their religions. Muhammad also established a process of consultation to make decisions about the community (Serjeant, 1978). Hence, the Charter demonstrated the future-oriented thinking of Muhammad and his ability to lead people from diverse backgrounds.

Muhammad also paid attention to organizing the Muslim community. His wisdom to create a cohesive and united community rotated around the idea of brotherhood in which he assigned each Muslim migrant (known as *muhājir,* the migrant*)* to a local Muslim (known as *Anṣār,* the helper) to create brotherly relations amongst each other. In most cases, the *Muhājirūn* had migrated leaving behind their property and belongings. Hence, they did not have economic resources or many social contacts in the new place. By creating strong social bonds between them, Muhammad not only averted potential conflicts amongst the newcomers and the host residents of the city, but also created economic and social opportunities and minimized economic hardships. His strategic planning reflects the

roots of humanitarian thinking on refugee issues that are prevalent to this day.

Muhammad took advantage of the peaceful life in Medina and continued his mission of conveying the message of Islam. He expanded his influence through diplomatic means and created alliances with neighboring tribes. He did not force conversion. He conveyed the Quranic message and his mission. The Quran was very clear about this particular issue. It says, “There is no coercion in religion” (2:256).

One of the objections that the people of Mecca had was that the Prophet was human just like them. The Quran reports their objection by stating, “What kind of prophet is he? He eats and drinks and walks in the markets” (Quran, 25:7). When the Prophet complained that people were stubborn and did not pay heed to his message, the Quran stated, “And even if we had sent down to them the angels, and the dead spoke to them, and we gathered together every [created] thing in front of them, they would not believe unless Allah should will. But most of them are ignorant [of that].” (Quran 6:111). It is significant to note that Muhammad achieved leadership and earned trust and loyalty by serving the community and demonstrating what he preached through practice.

Battles with the Quraysh

Muhammad built relationships and political and economic alliances with the tribes around Medina thereby securing the lives and economic wellbeing of his community. He was cognizant that the Quraysh and their politicking were in a position to destabilize the peace and safety of the nascent Muslim community. Medina was on the major trade route for the Quraysh and this strategic position helped Muhammad keep an eye on the activities of the Meccan tribes.

Muhammad and his followers understood the correlation between Meccan power and the Muslims’

safety very well. He realized that his community would be able to derail the economy of the Quraysh and hence their power by blockading the route. His long-term goal was the safety and prosperity of his community. By reducing the power of Meccans, Muhamad was increasing the safety of the Muslim community. He began sending groups of Muslims to raid Meccan caravans. Muhammad started raids against Meccan caravans after he received a revelation that gave him permission to fight and the assurance that Allah's support would be behind him. The Quran says,

> Permission [to fight] is granted to those who are being fought, because they have been wronged — and truly, God is able to help them — who were expelled from their homes without right, only for saying, "Our Lord is God." Were it not for God's repelling people, some by means of others, monasteries, churches, synagogues, and mosques, wherein God's Name is mentioned much, would have been destroyed. In addition, God will surely help those who help Him—truly God is Strong, Mighty (Quran, 22:39-40).

The above verses allowed the Muslims to battle the Quraysh, since they were victims of the latter's aggression. Another reason for the conflict was the Muslims' belief in One God. Hence, the Quran relates the fundamental difference between the Quraysh and the Muslims as the reason for their oppression and gives them permission to challenge their oppressors. Further, it demonstrates the conscientiousness of Muhammad who was careful not to get into needless armed conflict, showing his dislike for war.

In 624 CE, Muhammad led a contingent of 300 Muslims to raid a Meccan caravan. It is reported that when the Meccans heard that the Muslims were advancing to intercept the caravan, they sent a strong army of a

thousand people to fight against them. The battle took place at Badr. Despite being small in number, the Muslims defeated the Meccans and killed some well-known leaders, including Amar ibn Hisham known as Abu Jahl, a staunch opponent of Muhammad. In this battle, Ali ibn Abi Talib emerged as a hero; it is reported that he killed approximately 20 of the total 35-37 Meccans killed in the battle.

The battle increased Muslims' morale and confidence that their mission had divine aid. The Muslims captured 70 prisoners of war. Those who could pay ransom were released. Ransom was decided based on a prisoner's capacity to pay. Scaling different levels of payment based on a payee's economic condition was a unique concept. Those who were unable to pay were assigned to teach writing to 10 children (Lings, 1983). This was another innovative approach to find equitable solutions in the treatment of prisoners.

Managing Conflicts: Battleground Rules

Muhammad introduced clear and simple rules for war. He primarily emphasized that the ethics of Islam was to be practised under all circumstances but especially in war. He prohibited deviation from "the right path" (the teachings of Islam) and asked his followers to respect the dead, and to not harm non-combatants. He also instructed Muslims to protect trees and respect people in monasteries. He stated:

> O people! I charge you with ten rules; learn them well…for your guidance in the battlefield! Do not commit treachery, or deviate from the right path. You must not mutilate dead bodies. Kill neither a child, nor a woman, nor an aged man. Bring no harm to the trees, nor burn them with fire, especially those that are fruitful. Slay not any of the enemy's flock, save for your food. You are likely to pass by people who have devoted

their lives to monastic services, leave them alone (Rashid, 2012).

The Battle of Uhud

Following the defeat at Badr, the Quraysh reorganized under the leadership of Abu Sufiyan and set out to avenge their defeat. Abu Sufiyan marched toward Medina in March 625 CE, with his strong army of 3000. They camped in the valley by Mount Uhud. Upon hearing of their arrival, Muhammad gathered about 1000 soldiers and took up position on the hillside of the mountain. However, Abdullah ibn Ubayy departed with his followers and Muhammad was left with 700 soldiers. Muhammad stationed 50 archers with firm instructions not to leave their positions under any circumstances.

On March 19, 625 CE, both armies logged their horn in battle. Despite being outnumbered, the Muslims fought well and the Meccan forces were in retreat. At that moment, the archers saw that the Meccan army camp was unprotected; they ignored the Prophet's instructions and rushed to the camp. Khalid ibn Walid, one of the cavalry commanders in the Meccan army, saw the opening and returned to attack the Muslim forces creating chaos. Muhammad was injured. Ali stood by him fighting those who approached to attack Muhammad. There were a large number of casualties in the Muslim army including Muhammad's uncle Hamza ibn Abd al-Muttalib. It is reported that Abu Sufiyan's wife Hind had taken a vow to get Hamza killed and eat his liver to revenge her relatives killed in Badr.

Although the Muslims suffered significant losses at Uhud, the battle demonstrates Muhammad's military knowledge, strategy, and skills in the manner in which he fought a significantly larger army with abundant resources. It also shows his ability to listen and seek advice from all factions of Muslim community. It reflects his courage to go face to face with a large well-equipped army. He also

inspired confidence and courage amongst his followers when they went to face their enemy.

Battle of the Trench

Both sides continued to prepare for more battles. Both sought to make alliances with various tribes in their vicinities. It was not possible for the wars to stop until one side was decisively defeated. Their preparations led to the Battle of Trench (*ghazwah al-khandaq*) in March-April 627 CE

Abu Sufiyan amassed an army of 10,000 men. When Muhammad heard about the Meccan's extensive preparations, he gathered his team and discussed how to face the new threat to the community. Muhammad gathered a force of only 3,000 people. According to reports, Salman al-Farsi suggested digging a trench around the city. It was a successful strategy. The Meccan troops laid siege to the city for 27 days. They were unable to cross over the trench. Amr ibn Abd Wudd was able to cross the trench. People believed he was capable of fighting 1000 men. He challenged the Muslims to a duel. Ali ibn Abi Talib responded and killed him.

After 27 days in harsh weather conditions and lack of progress in battle, the Meccan confederates withdrew and left Medina. It was a success for Muslims after a tough time. They had faced hunger and starvation during this period. However, Muhammad had kept his followers motivated. He worked on diplomacy as well, tried to break up the Meccan confederate army, and kept his supporter tribes loyal.

This period also exposed those who, in spite of having agreements with Muslims, tried to negotiate deals with the Meccans when they saw the Muslims in a vulnerable situation. After the departure of Meccans, Muhammad also dealt with those who had broken their agreements. For Meccan tribes, it was a devastating enterprise in which they had invested enormous resources; they were left with

a broken confederate and financial loses; furthermore, they lost their control over the trade route to Syria.

Treaty of Hudaybiyyah

Muhammad was aware of the condition of the Meccans who were hurting financially and had very low morale after the Muslims had cut off their trade route. The Prophet strategically planned to visit Mecca and instructed his follower to prepare for the annual pilgrimage of Hajj. Some 1400 Muslims prepared for the Hajj. When the people of Mecca heard about it, Abu Sufiyan sent a contingent of 200 men; however, Muhammad forestalled the contingent and reached a place known as Hudaybiyyah. The Quraysh sent a negotiating team to make an agreement with the Muslims. During the negotiations, rumors spread that the Meccans had killed Uthman ibn Affan, a close companion of Muhammad. Hearing that negotiations ceased, the Prophet took an oath from his people that if they faced a situation of war with the people of Mecca, they would not run away and that they would accept whatever decision was made through the negotiations.

The oath is known as *bay'at al-riḍwān.* The agreement demonstrates Muhammad's leadership and wisdom in which he not only ensured support for the potential war situation but also for the agreement that he was going to sign with the Meccans. He must have anticipated that his followers had come for the Hajj with great excitement and expectation and if it did not happen, they would be disappointed; any agreement, no matter how good it was, would not settle well with them and they might not be able to see the long-term benefits.

Once the safety of Uthman ibn Affan was confirmed, negotiations recommenced and concluded with an agreement that required the Muslims to return to Medina that year but allowed them to return for the pilgrimage the following year, and it also provided for the termination of

all hostilities for the next ten years. The treaty recognized Muhammad as an equal and gave the Muslims the opportunity to focus on other issues that were pressing upon them. Muhammad had anticipated opposition to the treaty and some of his followers did oppose it and considered it a defeat. However, the Quran proclaimed it as a victory in Surah Fataḥ (Victory) (Quran: 48:1-29). The benefits of the treaty and Muhammad's negotiating skills had resulted in a long-term solution for the new community and ensured their safety and future participation in the Hajj pilgrimage. However, its full benefits would only play out the following year.

On his return from Hudaybiyyah in May 628 CE, Muhammad sent an army against Banu Nadir, the Jewish tribes of Khaybar. The Banu Nadir had conspired with various Arab tribes and incited them against the Muslims. They had violated the treaty that they had signed. Muhammad felt it necessary to remove the threat and uncertainty caused by Banu Nadir's actions.

Khaybar was a fortified place. Muhammad went with an army of 1,400 soldiers. It also included a group of women to take care of the wounded. The Jewish army consisted of 10,000 soldiers. Muhammad moved swiftly and took them by surprise. Muhammad was able to capture the smaller fortresses. The Banu Nadir's army did not come out in the open to fight, giving the Muslim army the advantage to take the smaller fortresses one by one. However, the Muslims were unable to conquer the largest fortress of al-Qamus for almost 18 days. During this period, Muhammad first gave the banner to Abu Bakr, then to Umar ibn Khattab and finally to Ali, who was sick with an eye ailment (al-Tabari, 1923). Marhab, a Jewish Chieftain, challenged Ali in a duel. Both fought vigorously; finally, Ali's sword pierced through Marhab's helmet and split his head. During the fight, Ali lost his shield and he pulled out the door of the Qamus fortress and used it as his shield; then, he held the door over the moat

to make it a bridge for the army to pass through and enter the fortress (al-Tabari, 1923).

After the conquest of Khaybar, the Banu Nadir signed an agreement with the Muslims that included the protection of their lives and property. In return, the Jews would share half of their crops with the Muslims.

In the post-Hudaybiyyah period, Muhammad sent letters to prominent people around the world, including Roman and Persian emperors. As it happened, the Treaty of Hudaybiyyah did not complete its two-year term. Banu Bakr, a tribe allied with the Quraysh, made a night raid on Banu Khaza'a, a tribe allied with the Muslims, killing several of the latter. Muhammad wrote to the Quraysh with three contingent choices:

1. Pay the compensation for those who were killed in the raid.
2. Break the alliance with Banu Bakr.
3. Proclaim the Treaty of Hudaybiyyah as null (Lings, 1983, 292).

The Quraysh accepted the last condition and broke the treaty. However, they quickly realized their mistake and wanted to change it, but Muhammad refused. He began preparing to march toward Mecca. In 630 CE, Muhammad went to Mecca and entered in the city without any battle; he pardoned every one for their past atrocities committed against the Muslims, including Hind who had chewed Muhammad's uncle, Hamza's liver. Muhammad, with the help of Ali, destroyed all the idols that were in the Ka'abah. Most of the residents converted to Islam.

The Last Pilgrimage to the Ka'abah

In 632 CE, Muhammad performed the Hajj pilgrimage, which he predicted to be his last. While returning from the Hajj, on March 9, 632, he made a stop at Mount Arafat where he gave his famous sermon. In his sermon, he emphasized the equality of all human beings, highlighted

women's rights, and a Muslim's social responsibilities. Some of the key features of his sermon were;

- All traditions of the age of ignorance were to be abolished. All murders committed during that time were forgiven; usury was abolished and owners could reclaim their capital.
- There was no superiority of Arabs over non-Arabs, or white over black or black over white.
- Women were equal to men; however, they were under the care of men; therefore, men were responsible for their welfare.
- Personal property was sacred and should not be taken unlawfully.

Walāyah of Ali ibn Abi Talib

Being a strategic thinker with great insight into people and the future, it is unimaginable that Muhammad would not have thought of appointing his successor. Did he not converse with his followers and close associates? It seems that the hadith and historical records were heavily censored after him, especially regarding any references to succession. We can make an educated guess that Prophet Muhammad recognized the opposition to the *Walāyah* of Ali amongst the influential Muslims, especially if *Walāyah* was understood as spiritual leadership in the interpretation of faith with the Imam holding total responsibilities for the welfare of believers. He feared schism or strong opposition happening during his lifetime and might have wanted to avoid it at all cost. Furthermore, the expanding Muslim empire was quickly developing as a source of tremendous wealth and power to ruling elites. Hence, they were not ready to deprive themselves of such privileges, and such trends began to emerge after Muhammad's demise.

Muhammad, who demonstrated extraordinary courage and resilience throughout his life, was hesitant to proclaim the *Walāyah* of Ali in his sermon at Arafat. Muhammad, the most Intimate Knower of the spiritual truth (*'ārif*)

received a stern warning from Allah. Muslim sources report that on March 16, 632 CE, Muhammad made a stop at Ghadir al-Khumm, a pond between Mecca and Medina. According to Shia traditions, the stop at Ghadir al-Khumm was in response to the Quranic verse that was revealed at that time: "Oh messenger, convey the message that has been revealed to you from your Lord, if you do not, then you have not conveyed His message, and Allah will protect you from the people. Indeed, Allah does not guide the disbelieving people" (Quran: 5:67).

This was a stern warning to the Prophet from Allah to convey the specific message that he had been commanded to convey. This message was so important that the completion of Muhammad's *risālah* (Prophethood) depended on the particular assignment that was entrusted to him. Allah reassured the Prophet that He would protect him from the people. Was Allah promising to protect the Prophet from people because of the opposition that might rise from the announcement of Ali ibn Abi Talib as his successor? Hence, the Prophet stopped at Ghadir al-Khumm and made the announcement about Ali ibn Abi Talib's succession.

This sermon was significantly different from the one at Mount Arafat. The sermon at Mount Arafat focused on social and economic issues. The sermon at Ghadir al-Khumm talks about religious and spiritual matters. The Prophet called upon Muslims, who were 70,000 to 120,000, to bear witness that he had conveyed the message. They affirmed him. He asked them: did they bear witness that there is one God and Muhammad is His apostle; there is heaven and hell; there is death, and resurrection after death; and the dead will be resurrected on the Day of Judgment. All of them affirmed the Prophet's statements. The Prophet said, "O Allah, bear witness." Then he said, "O people, Allah is my Lord and I am the lord of the believers. I am worthier of believers than themselves. Of whomsoever I have been Master

(*Mawla*) Ali is his Master. O Allah, be a supporter of whoever supports him (Ali) and an enemy of whoever opposes him and diverts the Truth from Ali" (Veccia, *EI*[2] n.d.)

Upon conveying the message about his succession, Shia sources believe that the verse of Quran claiming the completion of religion was revealed: "Today I have perfected your religion, and completed my favors for you and chosen Islam as a religion for you" (Quran 5:3). Sunni sources believe that this verse was revealed after the sermon at the Mount Arafat.

Succession was a major disputed issue among Muslims that resulted in the eventual split of Muslims into Shia and Sunni and numerous other smaller groups. It also set the course of history, literature, theology, and jurisprudence. The Shia believe that the Prophet clearly declared Ali as his successor and proclaimed that the Quran and the *Ahl-al Bayt* (the family of the Prophet through Ali and Muhammad's daughter, Fatima) are the strong rope that promises to guide Muslims and help them meet the Prophet at the Pond of *Kawthar* in Paradise. Sunni interpretations consider the Prophet's statements at Ghadir al-Khumm were made to ensure that Ali received respect from the community and that the community would continue to hold him in high esteem.

It is reported that Umar Ibn Khattab congratulated Ali for his succession and said, "Congratulations to you, Ali! This morning has brought you a great blessing. Today you have become the master of all believing men and women" (Ibn Kathir, 1932: 7:349). However, the reaction from other eminent *Aṣḥāb* (Companions) is not mentioned. One can assume that most of them were present and history being muffled about their response indicates the lukewarm reception of the announcement from others.

After returning to Yathrib (Medina), which was renamed Madīnah al-Nabī (The city of the Prophet) and

commonly called Madina, Muhammad consolidated his rule all over the Arabian Peninsula.

The Prophet's Death

Muhammad fell ill a few months after his last pilgrimage. He had a fever, headache, and weakness for several days. His last wish was to give away all his worldly possessions, i.e. seven coins that he had with him. He had not collected any wealth or any goods. He remained a mystic without worldly possessions. He passed away on June 8, 632 at the age of 62 or 63. He was buried where he died, in the house of his wife Aisha.

Muhammad's Leadership

Muhammad had an eventful life from his claim to Prophethood to his last breath on earth. He demonstrated his leadership as a social reformer in building a new community. His holistic approach to community building is a prototype for modern society. He ensured the development of all aspects of community life, social, cultural, educational, intellectual, and spiritual. He was also a strong advocate for equity and social justice. He advocated the rights of women, slaves, the poor, widowers, the elderly, orphans, and travelers.

In the 21st century, despite advances in science, psychology, and culture, societies and nations still face challenges of racism, sexism, xenophobia, and ageism. Prophet Muhammad provided protection against discrimination for all those groups of people such as foreigners, women, the underserved, and the socially marginalized. It was his wisdom, courage, and concern for humanity that enabled him to introduce those rights in a divided tribal society over 1400 years ago. He expanded the community from a handful of followers to a large multiethnic and multinational community. He took his community's wellbeing and welfare very seriously and

built relationships with neighboring tribes and nations within Arabia and beyond.

In spite of the difficulties he faced, Muhammad proved to be the leader who went against the grain, and challenged the social customs, traditions, and fundamental character of the Arab society of the time. He was a charismatic leader who transformed society and created a group of followers who were committed to his mission and devoted to him personally. Despite his sway over his followers, history demonstrates that he was not an autocrat in his approach; he created teams of advisors (*shūrā*) and he empowered Muslims to discover their own destiny. The Holy Quran recognizes the diversity of people and challenges people to reflect, think, and explore the world around them. Islam, as the religion reflected in the Quran, goes against the custom of following and practicing religion blindly.

Muhammad fought several defensive and some strategic battles and built alliances with other communities. In the battlefield, Muhammad not only demonstrated that he was a strategic thinker and planner but also applied humanistic principles even when he faced setbacks.

While being fully engaged with his community's worldly matters, he did not neglect his spiritual calling and intellectual search. One of the key messages of the Prophet was to encourage Muslims to seek knowledge. A famous saying of the Prophet notes, "It is the obligation upon Muslim men and women to seek knowledge, even if it is found in China." This hadith opens up numerous possibilities in the search for knowledge. It is also inclusive, which means gender differences are not an obstacle in the quest for knowledge.

According to another tradition, one must "seek knowledge from the cradle to the grave." The idea of life-long education that Muhammad promoted 1400 hundred years ago in the Muslim community was way ahead of its

time. Muhammad also introduced the idea of universal education. Historical records show that when the first battle at Badr with Meccan tribes took place in which Muslims won and held a number of prisoners of war, Muhammad promised to free them if they could teach reading and writing to children. This shows that Muhammad associated enduring value to education and considered education as an important pursuit in a Muslim's life.

The Quran, representing Muhammad's thinking and leadership model, assertively challenges believers to think and reflect. It creates scenarios and examples to make people understand the importance of knowledge and self-discovery. Rarely does any scripture directly and in a simple straightforward language implore its followers to travel, explore, and discover the truth beneath the creation on earth and in space as does the Quran.

The Quran often contrasts non-believers and believers perspectives based on knowledge. Hence, it uses the term *'kufr'* (concealing) or '*kāfir'* (the one who conceals), which could be interpreted as the one who conceals the truth or from whom the truth of knowing is concealed, to designate the term assigned to nonbelievers. A believer thus is one who seeks knowledge, explores the universe, and reflects on creation. The Quran mentions all ideas that contribute to holistic intellectual development, diverse learning styles, and all spheres in the cognitive development of a person. In contrast, the non-believer is one who worships (*wathan*) the status quo and stagnation, He/she is possessed by the memories of the past, remains ignorant and refuses to reflect and accept or adapt to change (Quran, 10:24 & 67; 30:8; 75:36; 23:115; 25:44; 7:184).

Muhammad promoted the equality of all human beings and he encouraged his followers to free their slaves and/or to treat them well, hence suggesting rules for slavery. He promoted women's rights to property, to marriage and

rights to seek divorce. It was 1400 years ago when he proposed that parents could not marry off their daughters without consent. Hence, he challenged the notion of an 'arranged marriage' in which a woman does not have a say. Women could seek divorce to get out of unhealthy marriages. He promoted education for women. He also discouraged discrimination based on race and ethnicity. Hence, he stated that Arabs were not superior over non-Arabs, nor white over black. The only criterion for superiority is *taqwā*, consciousness of the presence of Allah. *Taqwā* is a high station on the Sufi path that can be achieved after acquiring advanced knowledge and rigorous spiritual practices of *'ibādat* and *dhikr*. Hence, the Prophet emplaced very tough conditions to achieve status in Muslim society.

Muhammad was an educator and a coach for his companions. He taught by example. Hence, in Muslim culture, the Prophet's words and actions are regarded as models to be emulated. Some follow him to the letter and some in spirit; nevertheless, he remains a beacon of light for all Muslims to follow and receive guidance.

In spiritual discipline, Muhammad was the mystic par-excellence. He never let worldly obligations and his responsibilities to his followers, although voluntary, overshadow his spiritual search. Prophet Muhammad had a very difficult life. He lost his parents and grew up in poverty. Although he developed great empathy for the poor, the destitute, orphans, and widows, his primary source of solace remained his prayers and '*ibādāt*. He shaped Islam as a faith of social justice and compassion, but its primary inbuilt purpose remained getting close to the ultimate truth, Allah. Hence, daily obligatory worship was required and he encouraged additional voluntary prayers and *dhikr*. Fasting was required in the month of Ramadan and encouraged at other times. When he was departing from the world, his last wish was to give away his worldly possessions. He was the ruler of all Arabia but

he only held seven coins in his possession. In final analysis, his life could be summed up in his last words:

"Oh Allah, thou art the Exalted Companion."



Chapter 2

The Discourse on Muhammad ﷺ

Biographical Literature on Prophet Muhammad

The Arabian tradition of oral history focused largely upon tribal wars, heroes, and popular Arabian virtues. This tradition had an impact on the biographical writings on the Prophet. Before the appearance of Muhammad, the Arabs of central Arabia did not have a calendar. Each tribe had a memory of its ancestors and heroes, and they orally transmitted their histories from one generation to the next.

The earliest concept of history that emerged among the Muslims was a linear history, whose purpose was to realize an end within the temporal frame. If a general concept of history is reconstructed from the historical fragments found in the Quran, it may be seen as a chain of events, linked together by causality. It proceeded from a preplanned beginning to a predetermined end. However, occasional discontinuities disrupted this process, and a divine guide a prophet intervened to correct and redirect

this flow. A Prophet provided the necessary norms to ensure the safe passage of humanity through history.

With Prophet Muhammad, Arabs acquired a consciousness and a historical context. Through him, they also realized geographic relativity, i.e. their existence in connection with and in relation to other geographical regions. This awareness of their temporal and corporeal dimensions within the wider universal history was something new for Arabs in general.

The Quran was the catalyst in the realization of these two aspects of human consciousness. The Quran linked the history of the Arabs with the history of humanity that continued through the chain of prophets. Muhammad was a manifestation of that historical 'continuity.' In this regard, the Quran's emphasis on the history of prophets, as opposed to the history of rulers, marks a significant change in historical perspective (Hodgson, 1955). It marks a transition from tribal to universal history, whose focus was not on a ruler but a Prophet, endowed with the best moral qualities, high intellect, and profound spiritual consciousness.

From the first century of the *hijrah* (the year of migration), Prophet Muhammad became the major figure in the narratives of oral history. His socio-political achievements, his nocturnal vigils, and his ethics were the themes of these narratives. Early biographical works drew their source from the Prophetic Traditions (*ḥadīth*) and, especially, from his "military expeditions" (*maghāzī*) (Gibb, 1962, 111). However, during the second century of *hijrah,* Muslims began to write systematically on the life of the Prophet. The earliest surviving work on the Prophet is the famous *sīrah* of Muhammad ibn Ishaq ibn Yasar (d.151/768) (Gibb, 1962, 112).

Ibn Hisham edited and revised the work of his teacher as the *Sīrah al-Rasūl Allah* of Ibn Ishaq. It has been a basic reference for all subsequent writings on the life of Muhammad. In recent years, it has been translated into

many languages. From this biographical literature sprang various branches of historical writing, such as biographies of the Companions of the Prophet and the history of rulers. Further, writers of the biography of the Prophet paid serious attention to the habits and characteristics of the Prophet (*ṣifāt akhlāq al-nabī*) and the "signs of the Prophetic mission" (*a'lāmat al-Nubuwwah*) (Gibb, 1962, 113). The Prophet's physical features and characteristics (*shamā'īl*) were also described in some detail.

One can see this pattern in early literature, as in Mawardi's (d.450/1058), *Kitāb A'lām al Nubuwwah* (Cairo, 1391/1971), and Qadi Abd al-Jabbar's (415/1025) *Tathbīt Dalā'il al-Nubuwwah* (1966). Early writers used diverse methods to support their arguments regarding the validity of the Prophet's claim to Prophecy (*Nubuwwah*). They recorded historical events and cited scriptures, which authenticated and verified the acts and words of the Prophet. Muslim writers drew from the corpora of traditions and narratives about Muhammad and obtained information from Judeo-Christian sources including the Bible, which were rich in their records of prophets prior to Muhammad.

Muslim biographers also relied heavily on the Quran as a major source for Muhammad's life. Biographical literature greatly highlights the role of Muhammad in comparison to other prophets, in order to prove Islam as the most updated form of divine guidance to humankind. However, this process of articulating knowledge about the Prophet and Islam were contested fields. Writers often had their own perspectives and beliefs reflected in the literature and in the production of biographical knowledge. At the end of the process, certain narratives were established as legitimate and acceptable versions, and others were partly or entirely erased from the pages of history, as was the case with Ibn Ishaq's *History of the World*.

Ithbāt Literature

Ithbāth works emerged from the need to define the role and character of the Prophet an attempt to preserve traditions in the face of the rapidly changing sociopolitical realities within Muslim societies. Writing biography was a political act, which, on the one hand, reflected the devotion of some writers, and on the other, as contested knowledge, attempted to establish certain 'truth' outcomes. Though writers in the third/fourth centuries conducted detailed studies of Muhammad's life, certain historical facts were established whereas heavy editing and omissions had left gaps on other important issues with the lapse of two to three centuries. However, the literature reveals a personal relationship that Muslims had developed with the Prophet of Islam, which became an important and ongoing aspect of Muslim society and social discourse.

By the 3rd/4th Islamic century, Muslim society showed an increasing pluralism. People of diverse religious, cultural, and linguistic backgrounds flocked to the cosmopolitan cities of the Muslim world. Muslims cities were welcoming places for artists, writers, and thinkers. Religious and ethnic minorities were safe and protected. However, this vibrant intellectual environment also led to cultural debates and questions about various truth claims. These also exposed the diversity and disagreements within the community on religious and political issues.

Various approaches emerged, especially as a response to the polemical need to confront Jews, Christians and newly emerging philosophical ways of thinking. The personality of the Prophet served as a point of reference for Muslims to prove their arguments in the case of disagreements within themselves and even in debates with other groups.

The emergence of *Ithbāt* literature owes much to these theological controversies. For example, the historian, Ali ibn Sahl al-Tabari's (d. 214/830) monumental work, *Tarīkh al-Rusul wa al-Mulūk* (*A History of the Prophets*

and the Kings), which discusses prophetic miracles and signs and includes a discussion on the Quran, can be considered as the earliest surviving work belonging to the genre known as '*Establishing Evidences of Prophecy'* (*Ithbāt al-Nubuwwah*). *Ithbāt* literature aimed at establishing the legitimacy of Muhammad's Prophecy and Islam as the perfection of the divine message in continuity with the Judeo-Christian religious tradition (Mingana, 1923).

Historical consciousness played an important role in accomplishing this aim. In Muslim thinking, Islam represents a historical continuity with the Semitic prophetic tradition. Muhammad "was historically connected with the succession of prophets" (Rosenthal, 1968, 26). The implication is that the truth of the message, in spite of its renewal and apparent divergence from other revelations, rests very much on its emphasis on, and proclaimed continuity with earlier messages. It also made Islam the culmination and apex of the progressive perfection of the divine message.

The personality of Muhammad assumed a central role in defining the person and function of a Prophet. It was an evolution of the Muslim understanding of a prophet (Waldman, 1986, 12, 2). Although such literature had a latent polemical purpose, it was never of the same magnitude as the theological debates of the time, which virtually overshadowed the intellectual arena.

The personality of Muhammad became the focus of the debate among various groups. The Prophet became the discourse. Defining him meant shaping the polity and politics of society. This discourse of knowledge and power emerged as a result of the power struggle immediately after the Prophet's passing away.

Writers, Sufis, theologians, and politicians were defining the power structure, the nature of the state and society, and justifications for moral authority in society. Muhammad became the discourse in society by the

manner in which political writers emphasized his leadership and involvement in worldly affairs and projected him as an ideal ruler. Likewise, people who were disgusted with corruption and moral decay among societal elites also used Muhammad to record their dissent. This group defined Muhammad in terms of ethics, his repulsion of materialism and his voice and message against tyranny and the abuse of power. Those who were mystically inclined reported his spiritual practices. For them, he was the Spiritual Master, the guide on the path. Hence, Muhammad was a leader who rejected materialism, self-indulgence, and narcissism. These various approaches indicate the diversity of intellectual discourses in Muslim society and reflect its complex nature.

With increasing conversions of non-Arabs to Islam, the Arabian tradition of oral history for leisure and pleasure became redundant. Writing history for the specific purpose of explaining the signs of prophecy reflects a cultural and intellectual transition, which required a well-articulated, normative narrative about Muslim society and Islam. This development was a response to the need for the rationalization of beliefs and religious concepts.

Franz Rosenthal, pointing to this fundamental role of Muhammad, states, “Muhammad himself was the final goal of the historical processes which were set in motion with the creation of the world” (Rosenthal, 1968, 26). Muhammad thus appears as the culmination of this historical process; with him, history is perfected, and so, too, is education and human law (Rosenthal, 1968). The writing of biographical literature was influenced by these new trends. The doctrine of Prophecy was particularly the subject of constant controversy for Muslims, in their debates with Jews and Christians and, to a lesser degree, with philosophers (Hourani, 1985).

The earliest surviving Ismaili works on *Nubuwwah*, especially those belonging to the genre of *Ithbāt,* are the

Kitāb A'lām al Nubuwwah by Abu Hatim al-Razi (died ca. 934 C. E.) and the *Ithbāt al-Nubuwwah* of Abu Ya'qub al-Sijistani (died after 971 CE). Both these works have some distinctive features compared to other works in the genre.

Abu Hatim al-Razi's work is unique for its format and style, since it is a report of his debate with Abu Bakr al-Razi (d.313 AH/925 CE). Abu Bakr al-Razi questioned the validity of prophetic knowledge, the legitimacy of prophetic claims, contradictions and ambiguities in the messages of prophets, and the nature of miracles.

Ithbāt literature establishes evidences concerning the validity of prophecy based on moral conduct (*khulq*), the intelligence to manage human affairs (*siyāsah*), bravery (*shujah*), and the capacity to communicate with God. Finally, *Ithbāt* literature claims that the source of the prophet's legitimacy lies beyond human access; this endows him with supernatural powers to perform miracles.

Abu Hatim responds to all these issues by emphasizing the metaphysical roots of prophetic knowledge, the inner consistency of these messages, and the innate divine power which works through the prophets. Abu Hatim relies on traditional Islamic sources for his responses. With regard to content, it is similar to other works in this genre.

Abu Ya'qub al-Sijistani's *Kitāb Ithbāt al-Nubuwwah* is different from the *Kitāb A'lām al-Nubuwwah* (The Peaks of Prophecy) of Abu Hatim and other works of this genre. Sijistani approaches the issue in a distinct manner by using Neoplatonic philosophy to explain the progressive perfection of the divine message. Sijistani uses the notion of hierarchical creation to prove the superiority of the prophets and Prophet Muhammad in particular. The case of Abu Hatim is different in this regard, as he was responding to specific questions raised by Abu Bakr al-Razi that appear to be part of the larger societal discourse. Abu Hatim's tone is polemical and at times aggressive. Both works may be considered as early Ismaili contributions to *Ithbāt* literature.

The Power Discourse in Muslim Society

Friedrich Nietzsche states, "All things are subject to interpretation. Whichever interpretation prevails at a given time is a function of power and not truth." According to Nietzsche, ideas, rituals, or norms in society prevail since they are enforced through power and not because of their inherent truth. Discourses and narratives define a community's truths for society, and power imposes a particular version of the narrative and excludes non-confirming and dissenting narratives.

The hegemony of a particular discourse establishes truth in a society or community, through continuous reinforcement via rituals, customs, cultural practices, social pressure, and violence. In this process, various actors in society manufacture consensus. They use multiple methods to validate the narrative and legitimize its existence, including reward, violence, indoctrination, and fear. However, power is invisible and power actors can be identified only by going back to the point of incidence. The power of a discourse is such that it creates social, political, cultural, and religious norms.

Once ideas, practices, and values become norms, people do not question the truth or legitimacy of those norms. Theologians and scholars write within those norms; people follow them and believe that their salvation lies in those values and norms. The socially established narrative becomes the yardstick by which other ideas and values are judged, accepted, or rejected into the canon of knowledge.

The worst outcome of believing such interpretations as the norm is that these scholars and their followers are totally oblivious to the limitations of their knowledge and dogma; since they consider them universal norm and absolute, critical inquiry into those ideas are not considered. Openness to other ideas, beliefs, and worldviews is absent; they reject and critique other ideas, even though many such religious scholars may not have even read a book from scholars of other denominations,

nor travelled a mile outside their village, or attended another mosque, temple, or church. In most cases, their source of power is knowledge but they use violence, intimidation, and fear to impose their interpretation of religion.

Dissenting forces or discourses, if unable to dislodge the domineering discourse, temper it by infiltrating values and ideas into the domineering discourse. Hence, dissenting narratives survive at the margins of social discourse even during the most ruthless and absolute regimes of power.

Foucault states that knowledge is often seen as separate from power leading to the illusion that knowledge is not related to power. Frequently, knowledge is seen as a liberating force and the opposite of power. On the contrary, knowledge is intrinsically connected with power. Knowledge remains in disguise as an instrument of power to maintain the hegemony of a narrative. Power is embedded in language, places, artifacts, and symbols. Power is generally, but not exclusively, expressed and exposed through binary relations. These binary relations define, accord, and legitimize the location of power and appear in socially approved or disapproved language, actions, or communities of knowledge. Binary relations define power through sacred vs. mundane, halal vs. haram and good vs. evil.

An important aspect of Muhammad's social reforms was to diffuse the concentration of power in tribes, kinship identities, and nationality. He was aware of the dual role of knowledge, as a controlling mechanism when imposed through social hierarchy, and as a liberating force when it is reflective, analytical, and diverse. He promoted the democratization of knowledge and through it, power, as well as the diversification of sources of knowledge so that dogmatism and indoctrination were discouraged. For this reason, Islam, in theory, never had an organized church or a priestly class. All Muslims have the opportunity to read

the Quran and other religious literature, access any form of knowledge and participate in prayers and other rituals.[1]

A key feature in the emergence of Muslim society and the message of the Prophet was that Islam in its teaching accepted pluralism and openness to cultural and religious diversity beyond the borders of Arabia. Some of the principles and values that Muhammad introduced were ahead of his time. He promoted ideas that emphasized pluralism: diverse ways of life, beliefs, and cultural expressions. His ideas of globalism and human rights preceded the modern era of global human civilization. His novel ideas promulgated in the 6th century recognized the legal status of women, accepted their right to choose their spouses, to divorce them and their rights to own property. He accepted the legal status of people from other religions and communities, and the rights of other religions, not just Judaism and Christianity, but potentially all religions since 'all nations have received Prophets to guide them' (Quran, 10:47; 16:36; 40:78). Prophet Muhammad introduced the early Muslims, predominantly Arabs, to the modern era of a global human civilization that emerged in Arabia.

In the nascent society during the first two centuries of doctrinal struggles, many Muslims believed that the community had moved away from the ideal that existed during the time of the Prophet, which resulted in the prevalence of select interpretations of Islamic doctrine. Schools of jurisprudence emerged as the power struggle ensued. These were approved and legitimized, while some others, such as Shiite interpretations, were marginalized and ostracized.

Since the Shia became a minority, they evolved into groups that were seen as different from the majority. The

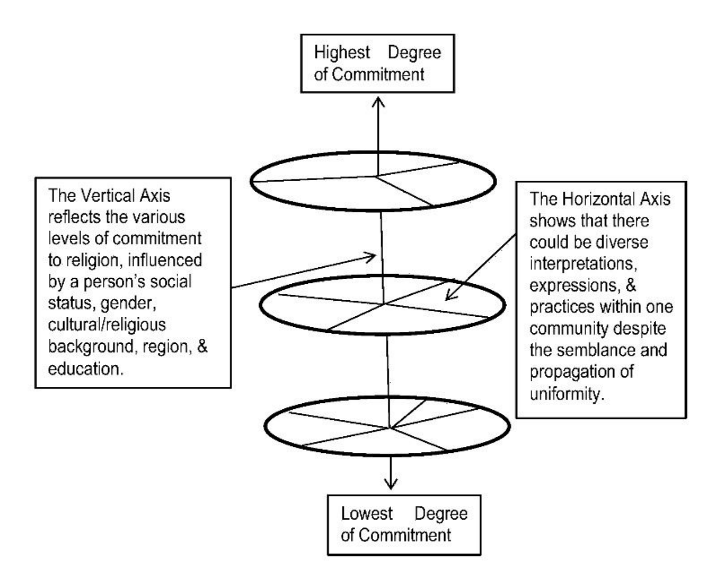
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[1] Although sections of the Muslim communities do not allow women to lead prayers if a male member of the community is present, the reforms that Muhammad introduced for gender respect and equity in a tribal patriarchal society were radical for its time.

majority and populace versions were forcefully imposed and maintained; hence, they became the norm and standard. In other words, through power, political and religious clergy established broad standards for religious and social norms. Hence, we find close relations between religious and political oligarchy in Muslim history.

In terms of the knowledge discourse, there were efforts by scholars to edit and censure existing literature and control the emergence of new ideas and thinking. Dramatic evidence is found in the confession of Ibn Hisham who edited his teacher, Ibn Ishaq's biography of the Prophet *Sīrah Rasūl Allah* (1955). Ibn Hisham reports, "Ibn Ishāq included material in his history that receives no mention in the Quran;" he included material "which is disgraceful to discuss; matters which would distress certain people; and such reports as al-Bakka'i (a student of Ibn Ishaq) could not accept as trustworthy" (Wright, 2010, 221). Hence, Ibn Hisham extensively removed material from Ibn Ishaq's book and it appears that Ibn Hisham's 'editing' was based on his personal beliefs, biases, and perspectives on morality.

Most religious communities perceive the world around them in binary opposites of believers and non-believers. In reality, there is a wide range of believers between these two extremes. Between these two polarities, there are believers whose levels of commitment vary. On a vertical axis, the top shows perfect faith in the message of the religion and the lower polarity marks a total lack of faith, which means the absence of belief or acceptance of the leadership of the founder of the faith. It does not matter how a community defines or measures degrees of faith. It is generally assumed that the 'message' is either accepted or not in its totality.



However, other levels of faith exist between these two points. The horizontal axis represents different perspectives on religion and its leadership that shape personal perspectives, such as background knowledge, culture, worldview, socio-economic status, personal or family values and ethics, economic goals, cultural and spiritual consciousness, personal and collective experiences, personal ambitions for resources and power.

According to the "theory of reception" by German thinker, Hans Robert Jauss (d.1997), the message is always affected by the cultural context of the recipient and "the horizon of expectation" of the society in which one inheres. A person's cultural context, life experiences, and knowledge enable the person to comprehend and interpret the message (Jauss, 1982). In this way, the recipient appropriates and transforms the message.

Diverse groups of people received Prophet Muhammad’s message. They had different social and cultural backgrounds, world experiences, and perspectives on metaphysical and religious matters. For instance, Muslims hold the companions of the Prophet in high esteem. However, all of them accepted Islam under different circumstances, for different reasons. Hence, diverse contexts and experiences mediated their acceptance of faith.

Early writers on Islamic history recognized such conditions and made serious attempts to classify and place them in a hierarchy. Early literature attempted to make distinctions amongst those who converted early in Mecca, and later after Muhammad’s migration to Medina, or even later, those who accepted Islam after his victory over Meccan aristocracy. These methods of categorizing Muslims were attempts to understand the motives and determine their levels of commitment to the Prophet.

The key question one needs to ask is - what does it mean to be close to the Prophet? Is it based on the outcomes of his proximity, such as personal transformation, or administrative or political success (e.g. establishing or running the state apparatus)? In other words, among the people who were close to the Prophet physically, some of them could be close to his spiritual message, others could be more attuned to his intellectual thinking, or to his message of social and economic change.

There is a saying attributed to the Prophet in which he said, “I receive the breath of the Merciful coming from the East.” According to historical reports, the Prophet was pointing to Yemen and indicating that there was a *sālik* (traveler on the spiritual path) referring to Uways al-Qarni, who lived in Yemen, who was close to Allah and it felt like the divine breath was coming from him. This is a powerful mystical statement, but it also indicates that even those people who are physically and temporally remote from the Prophet could be closer to him.

However, there is no way one can determine the inner motives for the acceptance of a religious message, or how diverse groups of Muslims understood the Prophet and his message. Little could be deciphered from the literature and views expressed by some staunch opponents and loyal friends and disciples of the prophet. Hence, in either camp, there was no single purpose, but there were diverse motives among believers to accept him and his opponents to reject him. There were people who had absolute faith or less, there were people who challenged his position on various matters, and there were skeptics who continued to doubt him.

These stands are evident from the Quran and the Prophet's biography. It means that the people who acknowledged his leadership and message, could have accepted him either due to his leadership, due to his message, or both. Hence, the notions of being the messenger of Allah and being the new leader among the Arabs held different meaning to different people. The diversity of views and beliefs become contesting ideas and a field of discourse. Whose discourse prevails? Who defines primary beliefs? Hence, a political struggle to control and define the knowledge discourse ensued.

Knowledge discourse is the primary mechanism for the control of the community's intellectual, cultural, and economic resources (Foucault, 1980). Two standards defined the status of people in the nascent Muslim community:

1) By time, meaning when a person accepted Islam;
2) By physical proximity to the Prophet, including those who became comrades in his struggles.

Furthermore, it does not necessarily mean that those who fit either criterion had a shared understanding of his

message, since their acceptance of it could be spiritual, canonical, cultural, and/or economic reformation.

In the literary corpora of the Muslim community, we find the classification of *aṣḥāb*, *tābi*ʻ*īn,* and *tābi*ʻ *al-tābi*ʻ*īn*. *Aṣḥāb* were people who met the Prophet and lived in his time. *Tābi*ʻ*īn* were those who came after the period of the Prophet and these people had the privilege of knowing or meeting the *aṣḥāb*, and the *tābi*ʻ *al-tābi*ʻ*īn* were those who met or knew the *tābi*ʻ*īn.* This classification indicates the importance of experiential and direct knowledge that a person could obtain from the Prophet and the people who knew him.

However, one impressive aspect of such classifications is that Muslims in general never believed that any form of knowledge could be perfect. Since they attributed perfection to Allah alone, they followed the principal of exception. This rule of exception was applied frequently. It suggests that there are always exceptions to socially defined norms and values.

Prophet Muhammad became the locus of religious and political power soon after his migration to Medina. This power increased tremendously with the consolidation and expansion of the state. The concentration of power in the person of the Prophet took the form of personal devotion and religious fervor (Horovitz, 1920, 1928). Muhammad, as the leader, established norms and values that had a great impact on society. He introduced a leadership style and decision-making methods that included open mindedness, eagerness to social change, pragmatism, universal perspectives, compassion, and above all, consciousness about the presence of Allah at all times and in all places.

The Christian Discourse on Muhammad

A major difficulty in assessing or comparing cross cultural ideas and values in general and religious personalities in particular, is that their leadership and ideas evolve in specific cultural and symbolic contexts. Comparing Jesus,

Krishna, or Muhammad would be a fallacy and would be misunderstood by people who are outside that particular symbolic world, including scholars who are inclined to be neutral and unbiased. All communities tend to re-envision the founders of their organizations, idealize them, and project them as exceptional leaders. Historical narratives are embellished and reinterpreted in ways that make them stand out as extraordinary human beings, who were able to accomplish something that ordinary people were unable to achieve.

Prophet Muhammad's invitation to Islam brought diverse groups of people around him. It created a culture and a social environment in which diverse cultural and intellectual forces were interacting. The Prophet promulgated ideas and values that were the catalyst for change in Arab societies and beyond. Prophet Muhammad had such a profound impact on society that he became a contested discourse.

Discourse is not only about the historical person; it emerges from cultural and historical processes that create norms, values, and mechanisms that include approved forms of behaviors but also manage deviations from these norms. The historical figure is the point of reference to legitimize the knowledge/power regime and execute repercussions for those perceived as not following the norms.

Changing or altering a discourse means changing a society in some fundamental ways. Hence, any changes to the established beliefs, culture, or narratives about the Prophet would result in changes to Islam as a religion and a civilization, and Muslims as a community. It would radically change Muslim identity.

Since Muhammad is a discourse representative of the Islamic faith, opposing forces become engaged in a contest to change perceptions, beliefs, and the community's knowledge about him. These forces include various factions amongst Muslims to present the Prophet in ways

to support their interpretation of faith, and non-Muslims to negate the status that he enjoys among Muslims and the world community.

Muslims expressed and reinforced devotion to Muhammad and the religion that he introduced. Non-Muslims used his name, life, and ideas to critique Islam and the Prophet. His achievements also encouraged people to write about him. Muslim biographers wrote detailed accounts of his life and highlighted his successes, and hostile non-Muslim writers, especially Christian priests, fabricated or exaggerated what they perceived to be the negative aspects of his life.

For Muslims, Prophet Muhammad was a perfect role model to be followed in all spheres of human life. Just as his political achievements were without a parallel in the past, so was his religious life a perfect balance between worldly and spiritual aspects. It was not very long before the "Muhammad of faith" emerged parallel to the "Muhammad of history," though the former aspect overshadowed the latter. The "Muhammad of faith" was closely associated with the events that took place around him and the socio-political changes that he had initiated. As a result, Prophet Muhammad became the very center of personal and communal devotion. After his death, his personality assumed a legendary character, which nevertheless, was deeply rooted in history. Muhammad is a discourse, as Jesus is for Christians, Krishna for Hindus, and Buddha for Buddhists. Muhammad is the core of Muslim faith.

Early Christian writings on Muhammad and Islam fell into the error of judging and evaluating the role and life of the prophet through their own belief and value lenses. They also had the agenda to prove that their point of view was correct and disagreements with their belief system were a fallacy on the part of Muslims, rather than being the difference between two religious communities. Hence, writings on Islam and Muhammad by Christians who were

predominantly priests, were contaminated by strong biases and preset agendas.

Furthermore, the ascendency of Europe as the harbinger of colonialism constructed the discourse of the outsider intent on dismantling indigenous and local discourses. In this process, early Christian writings against Islam and Muhammad set models and traditions for writings about others. The new European discourse was constructed with Christian and European cultural models. Europe believed in its own "jingoistic attitudes of cultural and religious superiority" and accepted as the norm "the too comfortable and convenient alliance between Christian mission and everything Western" (Bennett, 1991, 115).

Although Europeans or 'westerners' theoretically believe in the separation of Church and State in their political and cultural discourse, critiques of European hegemony perceive the intrinsic relationship and collaboration between Christianity and European cultural, economic, and political discourses in maintaining hegemonies over others. European and colonial writers continued to view others with biased lenses as sub-humans doomed to a religious or civilizational hell because these 'others' did not accept or fit in with their religious, political, or economic norms, ideas and practices. Hence, the tradition of orientalism was founded (Said, 1979).

In-group loyalties and biases play important roles even in contemporary societies, where knowledge produced and appropriated by North America and Europe set standards. Others are expected to follow their examples, methods, and linguistic codes in order to gain legitimacy.

The historical knowledge, perceptions, beliefs, loyalties, and devotions that the community has accumulated through centuries constitute the discourse on Prophecy and the idea of 'Muhammad.' He is the knowledge and power discourse in Muslim faith and culture deriving his wisdom from divine revelation, applying human intellect to resolve difficult issues, and

strategizing policies for his community's present and future. Although Muslims believe that divine revelation is the primary source of the faith, the person of Muhammad is the conduit through whom its ideas and values become reality.

Muhammad became a contested person for his opponents, especially the Christian polemicists of the Middle Ages. The means to curtail Islam was to attack the center of the Muslim faith that is Muhammad. Hence, Muhammad was at the core of the debate in early Christian writings. Such historical antagonism continues in modern times. Even today, writings on Islam and the Prophet Muhammad continue to be influenced by fictional and fabricated narratives of the Middle Ages, to the extent that Pope Benedict quoted a medieval source to present how Islam was spread through the sword. Polemicists from the Middle Ages, instead of being discarded as proponents of sheer propaganda constructing fictional accounts of Muslim history, were considered 'scholars' and much of their material is regurgitated to the present times as history (Wolf, 1986; Wasilewski, 2008).

Prophet Muhammad is the center of Muslim faith. Muslims have invested historical, cultural, intellectual, and spiritual capital in his personality. Therefore, they find any negative statements about him as extremely offensive. Wilfred Cantwell Smith, acknowledging Muhammad's status among Muslims, states,

> Muslims will allow attacks on Allah; there are atheists and atheistic publications, and rationalistic societies; but to disparage Muhammad will provoke from even the most 'liberal' sections of the community a fanaticism of blazing vehemence (Quoted by Schimmel, 1985, 4).

Recognizing the centrality of the Prophet in Muslim faith, Christian writers attacked and tried to undermine his achievements. Schimmel (1985, 4) states, "There is

scarcely any negative judgement that the Western world has not passed upon this man who had set in motion one of the most successful religious movements on earth." Respect and devotion to Muhammad is one of the most important cultural assets Muslims would claim to have.

There have been distinct changes in the perceptions and knowledge about Muhammad and modern scholars have treated this subject differently than in the past. However, in periods of conflict and social tensions, old attitudes and the old corpora of propaganda material are brought back and help to jog the collective memories of old cultural biases, beliefs, and narratives. Propagandists dig up historical references of antagonism and use them to establish arguments that Islam is a violent religion. This time around, so-called Middle East experts and media commentators take the lead.

Medieval Christian Polemics

Starting in the early 8th century, Muslim presence and rule in Spain and other parts of Europe lasted for almost 500 years. Muslim rulers of Spain allowed religious freedoms and did not interfere with internal religious matters. During this period, Spain became a multicultural, diverse, and cosmopolitan center of culture and learning. The conquest of Spain and other parts of Europe between 711 and 788 brought Muslims into close proximity with the Christian power center. Conquests by the Arab Umayyad dynasty created a unique religio-political dynamic between the Christian Church and the Umayyad state in Spain.

The military success of Muslims in Spain gradually verged into an ideological battle between the two communities. The Christian Church was a powerful institution in Europe and Muslim conquests dampened their influence. Bernard Lewis (1976, 89), describing such an attitude, states,

> Far from being prepared to recognize any merit or authenticity in Islam as a religion,

> Christendom had been unwilling even to take cognizance of the fact that it was a religion, as is shown by the persistence of European Christians in designating the Muslims by names that were ethnic rather than religious in connotation. In Greece, the Muslims could be Arabs, Persians, Hagarenes, or even Assyrians; in Russia they were Tatars; in Spain, Moors; in most of Europe, Turks; and in both Eastern and Western Christendom, they were commonly called Saracens, a name of obscure origin but certainly ethnic in meaning, since it is both pre-Christian and pre-Islamic.

During the Colonial period, Christians began to refer to Muslims as Muhammadans and Islam as Muhammadanism. Bernard Lewis (1976, 89) points out that "By false analogy, they called them Muhammadans and their religion Muhammadanism, on the totally false assumption that Muslims worshiped Muhammad as Christians worshiped Christ." This way of thinking continued to exist after almost 1400 years' of history together. Since Christian Churches have frequently been engaged in politics, power issues often mingled with faith issues.

The earliest Spanish Christian references to the Muslims are found in the works of two anonymous continuators of Isidore's *Historia de Regibus Gothorum, Vandalorum et Suevorum* (Mallette, 2007, 4). Both chroniclers give detailed information about the Muslim conquest of Spain but there is little information on Islam. The *Chronica Byzantia-Arabica* written around 741 CE describes Muhammad as the prince of the Saracens, "born of the most noble tribe of his people, a somewhat prudent man and a foreseer of some future events" (Wolf, 1986, 288). Further, the author commented that after his death Muhammad's followers "worshipped him with great honor

and reverence and affirmed him in their sacraments and scriptures to be an apostle or prophet of God" (Quoted in Wolf, 1986, 288). Hence, a comprehensive treatment of Islam and Muhammad is lacking in early writings. Early Christian writings in Spain making scarce references to Islam and Muhammad could be indicative of the absence of religious tension and the predominantly secular and pluralistic nature of state and government policies.

Politico-religious protests against Muslim presence in Spain changed the climate of mutual co-existence and tolerance. Mallette points out, "Christian representations of Islamic belief nearly always served an explicit tactical purpose: they refuted while they reported. But at the same time, medieval writings on Islam varied in their efforts to polemicize with precision" (2007, 216).

Between 850 and 859, Eulogius of Cordoba (d. 859) began a protest against Muslim rule in Spain. The Martyr's Movement began with Christian priests and monks coming to the palace of Muslim rulers and shouting abuses at Muhammad's name. The Martyr's Movement was the first resistance movement against Muslim rule in Spain. Eulogius of Cordoba was the spokesperson who promoted martyrdom as a method of resistance. Eulogius, in his writings, highlighted and enlarged the differences between Muslims and Christians in order to instigate the Christian population to work against the Muslim rulers. He also produced a short anti-Islamic biography of the Prophet Muhammad that he claimed he had found at the monastery of Leire in Navarr (Wasilewski, 2008, 333). The book was not a scholarly work but more like a propaganda pamphlet to incite Christians and create resistance against Muslims. These early writings on Islam and Prophet Muhammad reflected the polemical writings of the time.

Initially, the movement did not receive much support from the population. Eulogius and his small band of people began to use various methods of protest to vilify Islam and Prophet Muhammad. In a ten-year period, about

fifty Christians died. In reality, these periodic protests, although Spanish and European writers called them Martyr's Movements, were never active and vibrant resistance against Muslims rule (Mallette, 2007, 289).

Eulogius claimed the exclusivity of Christianity in the *Liber Apologeticus Martyrum*, composed sometime between 857 and 859. He perceived the dominance of Christianity all over the world. He stated, "(Christianity) penetrated every corner of the world and traversed every nation on earth." He saw church doctrine as complete, and therefore, it did not require anyone to come after Jesus and make changes. It was a clear reference to Muslim beliefs that Islam was a continuance of Judeo-Christian prophecies. The document by Eulogius demonstrated a desire for the Church to control the world. He saw Islam as competition and an obstacle in the achievement of such goals.

Eulogius, describing his reasons for vilifying Muhammad, states, "He teaches … that Christ is the Word of God, and the Spirit of God, and indeed a great prophet, but bestowed with none of the power of deity" (Mallette, 2007, 291). Hence, a contentious point was that Muslims or Muhammad did not accept the divinity of Jesus. Accepting the divinity of Christ as Christians do goes against the core belief of Islam, which is an unequivocal affirmation of the Unity of God (*Tawḥīd*). Hence, to provoke the Christian population, propagandists presented Muhammad and Islam as a threat to their own core beliefs and presented Islam and Muhammad as someone or something they should fear.

By creating representations of the Prophet Muhammad as a Christian heretic or anti-Christ, Eulogius constructs a narrative that made Islam an offshoot of Christianity (Wolf, 1986). Since Eulogius and other Christian propagandists of the Middle Ages fictionalized versions of Islam and the life of the Prophet, they conveniently changed labels and accusations against Islam as needed.

The *Biblioteca del Seminario di Pisa* (cod. 50) presented Islam as a heresy and not as a pagan sect (Lewis, 1976, 57). At one stage, Islam was a pagan religion and at another, it was considered a heresy within Christianity, or a form of distorted Christian beliefs (Ferreiro, 2003).

The Middle Ages are marked by sectarian movements within the Church, the reformation, and the Church's responses to dissent. The Church's judicial branch began the infamous Inquisitions. The Church accused religious dissidents with magic and witchcraft that continued until the 19th century. When signs of women's liberation movements emerged, the church condemned them as witches. The Inquisitions spread through a great part of the world in about seven to eight hundred years. The Church's preoccupation with the primitive magic, exorcism, and power was reflected in its policies and strategies against religious dissent. Hence, it is not surprising that their favorite attack on Islam and Muhammad included accusations of magic and witchcraft.

Another book that influenced the representation of Muhammad and Islam in Europe was Embrico of Mainz's (12th Century) *Vita Mahumeti.* Embrico tried to establish that Muhammad was a Christian who left Christianity or was excommunicated because of his anti-Christian views. Christian writers such as Embrico associated Muhammad with Simon Magus (ca. 1 CE), a sorcerer, who misled Christians from the right path (Ferreiro, 2003). Simon Magus lived almost six centuries before the Prophet. The New Testament, Book 5, Acts of the Apostles (8:9-24) presented Simon Magus as a person who sought the power of miracles that the Apostles had. He exerted significant influence over a group of people through his religious position within his community. Irenaeus (d.ca 202) held him as a founder of Gnosticism and the sect of the Simonians. Many Christian writers of the Middle Ages regarded him as the source of heresies and labeled him as a magician. It is said that Simon did not rigidly follow the

Church's teachings and guidelines and was inclined toward mysticism and philosophy, which did not settle well with authorities in the Middle Ages.

In *Vita Mahumeti,* Embrico of Mainz presented Muhammad as a camel herder who was a follower of Magus (Ferreiro, 2003). Embrico associated Magus with Muhammad and made them partners. Embrico created parallels between Muhammad and Simon Magus. Christian writers attributed Magus' ability to gather a large number of followers to magic. Likewise, Embrico attributed the art of magic to Muhammad's abilities to attract people to Islam.

Embrico fabricated a story that Magus went to Jerusalem where the "father of the city" had died. Magus deceived a large number of people and convinced the King of Jerusalem to proclaim him as a "Pontifex" of the city. Once he was appointed as Pontifex, a group of demons appeared and terrified people. People consequently rebelled against Magus and demons took him to Libya where he vowed to take revenge against the Church by corrupting its teaching. In Libya, Magus purportedly met Muhammad, where they plotted and killed the Governor of Libya. Further, Embrico stated that Magus built a temple in honor of Muhammad in Libya who was able to attract followers through his magic.

It is interesting to see how story-telling and manufacturing knowledge skills were used to produce negative yet powerful narratives against Islam and the Prophet. Since flying was associated with witchcraft and magic in Christian myths, events in Muhammad's life such as the *Mi'rāj* provided fodder for Christian writers' imagination to concoct stories about the Prophet with no regard to historical truth or authenticity. Christian polemicists, who were mostly priests, did not want to see a parallel to the Ascension of Christ (Luke 24:50-51 and Acts 1:1-15); hence they attempted to discredit Muhammad's ascension to heaven during his *Mi'rāj*. The

primary purpose was to establish a discourse that undermines or dismantles the discourse of tolerance and mutual co-existence created by Muslim rulers in Spain.

Later, in the 14th century, Christian sources, such as *Liber Nicholay,* attributed floating bodies to tricks that used magnets to suspend bodies from ceiling in a temple rather than magic. In this anonymous work, Muhammad is identified as being the same as Nicholas. In addition, Mecca was named as the city where Muhammad lived not Libya to provide authenticity while at the same time retaining other concocted elements such as magic and trickery. In all such attempts, the purpose was undermine the message of Islam by reducing it to a Christian heresy (Ferreiro, 2003).

Another narrative that Christian polemicists developed described Muhammad as an orphan who was placed in the care of a widow who sent him on business trips. During his travels, he purportedly joined assemblies of Christians and memorized what they said. Hence, they tried to connect the origin of the Prophet's knowledge to Christian sources (Wasilewski, 2008). Christian writers also added that Muhammad predicted that he would be resurrected on the third day after his death. "After he died his followers kept watch over his corpse, but when the third day had passed without result, they left the corpse unattended" (Wasilewski, 2008, 336). Such examples were used to emphasize the falseness and futility of Islamic teachings in comparison to Christianity.

Durante degli Alighieri known as Dante (c.1321) personified Muhammad in *Inferno 28*. In the Prophet's biography by Ibn Hisham, a childhood incidence known as *sharḥ al-ṣadr* — the opening or expansion of the heart (lit. chest) is narrated. According to Muslim traditions, angels descended to a place where the young Muhammad was herding sheep. Angels opened Muhammad's chest and purified his heart (Ibn Hisham, 1955). Medieval Christian polemicists twisted this event to indicate that its purpose

was to prepare him to work against Christianity (Mallette, 2007).

When Dante wrote his book, fables against Islam and the Prophet were rampant. Europe's fear and fascination with the exotic and the strange made fictive stories about Islam and Muhammad more acceptable. For example, they projected him as a former Christian, who left Christianity when the cardinals who had promised him that he would become the Pope after the death of the current pope did not fulfill their promise; hence he plotted the downfall of Christendom (Mallette, 2007,1-2). To discredit Muhammad further, they attributed his miracles as trickery (Mallette, 2007, 3).

All these stories resulted in Dante (2006) placing Muhammad in *Inferno* in his *Divine Comedy* (Dante, Canto 28). Even though these depictions were offensive and degrading, such narratives about Islam and Muhammad became so frequent and normative that Europeans accepted these as factual reporting of the events in the Prophet's life or Islamic history. In current times, these denigrating narratives have taken the form of the cartoons debacle that is discussed further below.

On January 8, 1455, Pope Nicholas V issued the bull *Romanus Pontifex* (Encyclical) giving the Spanish King Alfonso permission to kill Muslims, capture their territories and economic resources on behalf of the Church (Davenport, 1917). The Pope ordained,

> King Alfonso…to invade, search out, capture, vanquish, and subdue all Saracens (Muslims) and pagans whatsoever, and other enemies of Christ wheresoever placed, and the kingdoms, dukedoms, principalities, dominions, possessions, and all movable and immovable goods whatsoever held and possessed by them and to reduce their persons to perpetual slavery (Davenport, 1917, 20–21).

In the 18th century, Edward Gibbon's (d. 1794) monumental work on history became popular around Europe. However, when Gibbon reported about Muhammad, his language was condescending and judgmental. His abrasive language further demonstrated the influence of medieval writings on Islam by the Church and missionaries and existing biases against Islam and the Prophet. Describing Muhammad's inclination toward meditation and contemplation, Gibbon states,

> From his earliest youth Mahomet was addicted to religious contemplation; each year, during the month of Ramadan, he withdrew from the world and from the arms of Cadijah [his wife]; in the cave of Hera, three miles from Mecca, he consulted the spirit of fraud or enthusiasm, whose abode is not in the heavens, but in the mind of the prophet" (Lewis, 1976, 31).

In Gibbon's construction of the narrative on Muhammad's habit of meditation, he tries to downgrade his noble practice of asceticism, which was otherwise highly regarded among Christian ascetics. He attributes the practice to Muhammad's desire to gain power through illegitimate means, i.e., "he consulted the spirit of fraud or enthusiasm" (Lewis, 1976, 31). Gibbon also implies that the source of Muhammad's ideas and revelation was not divine but in his mind. Hence, despite having resources available on Islam and Muhammad's life, objectivity was lacking and prejudices persisted in reporting and interpreting religious history.

Gibbon also attacked the Quran and tried to counter argue its claim to be a miracle by challenging humans and Jinns to bring something similar to its verses. Criticizing the claim that the Quran is a miracle, he stated,

> In the spirit of enthusiasm or vanity, the prophet rests the truth of his mission on the merit of his book, audaciously challenges both

> men and angels to imitate the beauties of a single page, and presumes to assert that God alone could dictate this incomparable performance. The harmony and copiousness of style will not reach, in a version, the European infidel; he will peruse, with impatience, the endless incoherent rhapsody of fable, and precept, and declamation, which seldom excites a sentiment or an idea, which sometimes crawls in the dust and is sometimes lost in the clouds (Lewis, 1976, 32).

Gibbon again tried to undermine the Prophet's message and the role of a scripture, the Quran, as a transformative force that brings quality and values to a believer's life.

Before Prophet Muhammad, most religions considered extra sensory occurrences as miracles. The Pentateuch and the *New Testament* are full of such stories and we see the impact of such beliefs on the evolution of Christianity, which mixes dogma with spirituality and superstitions. On the other hand, Muhammad brought this revolutionary idea that knowledge could be a miracle. For Muslims, the Quran as a source of beauty and knowledge is the true miracle and its ability to transform people is the miracle. The Quran created a balance between the mundane and the spiritual and encouraged its followers to keep a balance between the two aspects of life. Although it is not expected that a person like Gibbon, who is outside the discourse of Islam, would appreciate the experiences that Muslims could obtain from the Quran, his tirade demonstrated bias and strong resentments against Islam.

For Gibbon, the idea of balancing the faults and virtues of his narrative about Muhammad was to label him as an enthusiast or imposter (Lewis, 1976, 33). He states, "I should decide whether the title of enthusiast or impostor most properly belongs to that extraordinary man" (Lewis, 1976, 33). Gibbon used two negative terms to describe

Muhammad and he excluded describing his virtues. In the early 17th Century, the term enthusiast was used to denote a person who is divinely inspired from the French *enthousiastē* or ecclesiastical, and the Latin enthusiast, 'a member of a heretical sect' (Oxford English Dictionary). Was he labeling Muhammad as belonging to a heretical sect of Christianity? If so, he was repeating what Christian priests alleged since their early encounter with Islam. Gibbon's condescending narrative concludes (Gibbon, 1932),

> From enthusiasm to imposture the step is perilous and slippery; the daemon of Socrates affords a memorable instance, how a wise man may deceive himself, how a good man may deceive others, how the conscience may slumber in a mixed and middle state between self-illusion and voluntary fraud. Charity may believe that the original motives of Mahomet were those of pure and genuine benevolence; but a human missionary is incapable of cherishing the obstinate unbelievers who reject his claims (Lewis, 1976, 34).

Bernard Lewis affirms that the medieval perception of the Prophet as a showman and imposter are reflected in Gibbon's *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (Lewis, 1976, 208). One should be mindful of the fact that active clergy in the church and historians produced these narratives. They exerted considerable influence in public life and they were custodians of knowledge in Christianity until modern times. Therefore, common people, who expected 'truth' and sacred words to come out of their mouths, accepted those fictionalized narrative as facts and this use of manufactured knowledge continued. It also reflects the binary process by which in-group knowledge is valued higher than the knowledge received from out-

groups, even when knowledge about out-group lacks objectivity and historical authenticity.

The Contemporary Discourse on Islam and Muhammad

European colonial powers shaped modern Muslim societies. Their influence persisted long after they were gone since their economic, cultural, and political impact remained. European sway created conflicts between the indigenous and the foreign. Political and economic relationships created dependencies on European knowledge and research, business models and practices, and political ideologies. Muslim lands were a large part of the colonial enterprise. Colonial powers established geographical divisions and political organizations that aimed at maintaining some form of remote control dependency. Their arbitrary creation of countries instigated border conflicts such as those between India and Pakistan, and their establishment of Israel created conflict between Israel and Arab countries.

Furthermore, they installed tribal leaders as kings in most Middle Eastern countries. These forms of government maintained primitive, tribal, and family control over political systems and deprived the populations of these countries of modern democratic institutions and participation in a political system. These archaic political systems based on personal family interests had long-term consequences for the economic, social, educational development of the masses, and the distribution of resources, ensuring continuing underdevelopment. Consequently, the political struggles fought for decades in these countries for human and civil rights and political participation frequently stalled equitable economic and educational development.

In the Post-9/11 era, ‘Islam’ is at the center of the global power struggle. Western societies broadly consider ‘Islam’ as an ideological opponent that controls the political, cultural, and economic resources of the Middle East and some other parts of the world. In the current global geopolitical situation, the Soviet Union has disappeared but Russia has emerged with new power along with China.

Islam, thus, becomes a contesting notion, an 'enemy', and the binary opposite to the Western-Christian-Capitalist discourse. The discourse becomes associated with the economic, political, and cultural interests of 'western civilizations.' In this process, what was a forward-looking civilization is reduced to a foil that can prove and justify a host of predatory responses by the 'civilized world.' 'Islam' as a set of ideas and values and a generic reference term is used to demonize, ostracize, and subjugate a group of people in developing societies, irrespective of varied degrees of religious affiliations, who happen to be sitting on enormous natural resources, and located on major trade routes.

In this context, Muslim societies are most vulnerable. It is in the interest of global neo-imperialist powers to maintain the status quo of petty dictatorships at the expense of the economic and political freedoms of Muslims. Muslim countries have been undergoing turmoil for decades, exacerbated by the Soviet Union's invasion of Afghanistan and the emerging reactionary forces that turned against the nations that nurtured them. The failure of Arab Springs in Egypt, and other 'friendly' Arab countries are examples of the west's involvement in those countries. The Syrian conflict is an example of the global powers' struggle in the region, where various power groups are engaged in war through their proxies.

Vested interests including multinational corporations, hegemonic religious oligarchy, and political leadership find it convenient to exploit the knowledge and perceptions that were historically manufactured in the west against, and about Muhammad and Islam to reframe the current narrative. Although 'Islam' and Muslims are at the margin of the global cultural and political discourse, and the west is central to the binary relation that defines the other, an illusion or fiction is created to show that 'Islam' is at the center of the discourse. To make this illusion real, the myth is propounded that "Islam is the fastest growing religion" presumably through an imagined primary threat of proselytization. Secondarily,

population growth or more explicit forms of self-identity, including the visual imagery of the Hajj, are propagated to enlarge the 'threat.' Likewise, the negative use of adjectives such as 'Islamist,' 'Islamic,' or 'militant Islam' emphasize the supposed omni-presence of the Islamic and Muslim phenomena.

Hence, 'Islam' as an identity shaping entity for over 1.5 billion people is a cultural resource that 'needs' to be appropriated by the west to achieve its hegemonic goals. Thus, the culture must be neutralized as a conduit to achieve political and economic goals. The west adopted predatory practices to achieve its goals, therefore, proselytization, invasions, establishing so-called 'moderate' yet non-democratic dictatorships fit well into the agenda of bringing about cultural change and political conditions that enable the management of satellites states. Hence, colonialism and neocolonialism are not only economic or political domination but also cultural domination.

Thus, 'Islam' as an identity and cultural resource for locals becomes an obstacle. It becomes imperative for imperialist powers to neutralize it or marginalize it through negative propaganda, false information, and making it a stigma so that the followers of the faith distant themselves from it. It is a long-term strategy that targets youth and young generations who may feel embarrassed and distant themselves from the faith of their ancestors.

The discourse of knowledge and power has the tendency to monopolize its control; hence the expression or belief that one's own religion is frequently the only source of salvation. Dominant discourses, even if economic and political interests do not exist, would exercise power and subjugate, neutralize, or eliminate other discourses, until the 'threat level' is reduced to such a degree that their existence is rendered ineffective or meaningless. Muslim discourses being traditional do not have complex mechanisms as compared to the West that would allow them to compete with or combat Western discourses. Though they have demonstrated resilience in the face of

colonial hegemony, Muslim societies are polarized and divided. Colonialism supported extensive missionary work of proselytization, and indoctrination through the educational system. Colonial powers created an Anglicized cadre of administration and civil servants, military leadership, and later politicians who were Anglicized could not successfully create a synthesis of modernity and tradition.

Hence, attempts to define Islam and Muslim societies continued in the post-colonial era. Cultural institutions, such as media, movies, and educational institutions, aggressively engage themselves to define Islam and a Muslim for consumption by the global audience. They manufacture and even nurture an idea of Islam, which is militant, fundamentalist, or extremist. Since the dominant discourse defines its role in a global society as a singular truth, it constructs knowledge in such a way that it glosses over the physical, cultural, symbolic, and economic violence it imposes on the weak, voiceless, and dispossessed.

The publishing of cartoons about the Prophet was a "freedom of speech" issue for a western audience. Freedom of speech originated in Europe and its application in multicultural global societies required respect for diverse views, beliefs, and forms of expressions. It is a challenge for all societies to examine how such an important idea as freedom of speech could be applied in various cultural contexts.

By depicting Prophet Muhamad in the cartoon with a bomb in his turban, the cartoonist makes a racist generalization that all Muslims are violent and Islam and Muhammad promote violence. He was making a political statement and committing symbolic, psychological, and political violence. Unwittingly, the cartoonist supported the hegemonic forces in this cultural and political contest. By caricaturing the image of the Prophet, he was regurgitating the same bias that medieval writers promoted for centuries. Is this indicative that in spite of Europe's proclamation about secularism and atheism, medieval values are deeply ingrained in their consciousness?

The cartoonists were outside the minority Muslim discourse; therefore, they did not have any cultural, political, and religious investments in it. They were speaking from the pulpit of the hegemonic power position. As members of privileged western societies, they enjoy wealth and protection that give them the power to produce and distribute knowledge globally and to influence the knowledge discourse that underprivileged Muslim and low economic and cultural status societies lack. Hence, the publication of anti-Muhammad material appears to support the agenda of the ultra-conservative and ultra-dogmatic factions in Europe and North America. The writers and cartoonists who published works against Muhammad also demonstrate that they have not achieved freedom from the discourse that had crippled and controlled their consciousness. Depicting the Prophet unfavorably reinforces the indoctrinated myth about 'us vs. them' that the western capitalistic system has created for the consumption of its people

A positive outcome of the conflict between extremist political agenda is that the silent majority in the west and in Muslim societies have become vocal in resisting reactionary forces intent on wedging differences and creating antagonism among Muslims and others. President Barack Obama has taken pains to highlight the political agenda of extremist groups in Muslim and western societies. Islam is a faith of a billion and a half peaceful and law-abiding Muslims. Similarly, Pope Francis' statements about religious intolerance, the desecration of religious figures, and violence and human tragedy in the Middle East resonate with common Muslims. Likewise, Prince Karim Aga Khan has been a strong advocate of building bridges among Muslims and non-Muslims. His efforts and institutions promote Islam's cosmopolitan ethics, vibrant culture of art, music, and architecture, and Islam's ethic of service to others by building schools, hospitals, and financial institutions to eradicate poverty, disease, gender and class inequalities. For His Highness the Aga Khan, these activities

are a true reflection of his ancestor's, the holy Prophet's life, character, and spiritual and worldly mission (See chapter 8).

Chapter 3

Ismaili Savants on *Nubuwwah*

Early Ismaili Literature

The origins of the Ismaili Tariqah go to the question of succession after Prophet Muhammad. It is reported that while returning from the Hajj Pilgrimage on 18th Dhul-Hajj, 10 Hijrah (March 10, 632 CE), Muhammad stopped at Ghadir Khumm, a pond junction where people dispersed to their destinations after returning from the Hajj. The Prophet declared Ali ibn Abi Talib as his successor at Ghadir Khumm (Ibn Kathir, 1956).

However, there are diverse interpretations of the Prophet's message and disputes over the issue of succession. Abu Bakr was selected by a group of Muslims as their Caliph. Even though Ali accepted Abu Bakr and after him, Umar ibn Khattab, and Uthman ibn Affan as Caliphs and remained quiescent, he never quit his claim. According to Shia beliefs, *Walāyah* is divinely ordained which no one can take away, whereas Caliphate is identified as a secondary political institution, whose absence does not stop the Imam from performing his duties.

The family of Ali was constantly harassed and persecuted during successive governments. During the

time of Yazid ibn Muawiya, Imam Husayn ibn Ali was killed along with his family at Karbala (Talbani, 2016). The harrowing conditions for Ali's family did not change during Abbasid rule. Despite being related to the children of Ali and from the same kin, the Abbasid also kept the descendants of Ali under surveillance.

It is reported that Imam Jafar al-Sadiq led a secret movement against Abbasid rulers and he sent his *dāʿīs* (missionaries) across Muslim lands to continue the daʿwah (invitation to the faith). Ismaili history maintains that Imam Jafar al-Sadiq sent his eldest son Ismail to lead the daʿwah in the period known as *al-dawr al-satr* (The period of concealment) in Ismaili history. In this period, *dāʿīs* in different parts of the Abbasid Empire attempted to draw support and were engaged in the development of Ismaili thought. One example of such scholarly activities was the group of thinkers known as the Ikhwan al-Safa, who produced *Rasā'il Ikhwān al-Ṣafa*, a work of encyclopedia nature that reflected their broad scholarly orientation. One could surmise that there were number of other scholars whose works did not survive and who did not attain the fame that the Ikhwan received.

Modern scholars have speculated that Ismaili literature written in the earliest period reflected an embryonic form of the Ismaili movement and early beliefs disappeared or were abandoned by the community once they established the Fatimid state in North Africa and Egypt (Ivanow, 1957; Brockelmann, 1937). It is evident that there were significant developments of thought in Ismaili literature during the period when the Ismaili Imams were in concealment (*satr*), a period that covers over one and a half centuries from the middle of the second century to the end of the third century A.H (Madelung, 1986, 249).

Ivanow argues that the maturity of Ismaili literature, as it appeared immediately after the advent of the Fatimid caliphate, indicates a possible disappearance of early literature. He attributes the reason for such a phenomenon

to the "'reform' which took place sometime before the rise of the Fatimid caliphate in 297/909" (Ivanow, 1957, 1-2). He also emphasizes the 'moderate' nature of early Ismaili literature, which he considered to be in conformity with general Shiite doctrine held by other so-called moderate branches of Shi'ism (Ivanow, 1957, 3). This literature was based on the Quran, the traditions of Muhammad and Shi'i Imams. Ivanow (1942) adds that Ismaili writers produced a unique brand of *ḥaqā'iq* literature that was based on 'philosophical speculations.'

Ḥaqā'iq is a genre of literature that aims to reveal higher spiritual truth to the initiated. It is derived from sacred texts through the method of *ta'wīl. Ta'wīl* from the root *a-w-l* means "to make a return to, to redirect, or to recall." In Ismailism, "every sacred text had its hidden inner meaning, the *bāṭin*, which was contrasted to the *ẓāhir*, its 'apparent' or literal meaning" (Hodgson, 1960, 1098-1100). With the method of *ta'wīl*, the inner meaning is discovered.

Henry Corbin, considering its more profound connotation, defines *ta'wīl* as "spiritual exegesis" or "symbolic exegesis." By this, he implies "a return, of exodus" that is going outside the letter, which will be a return paradoxically into one-self (Corbin, 1957, 65). Thus, at the esoteric level, "it is the return to the archetype, the journey back to the Origin" (Filippani-Ronconi, 1977, 107).

The terms, *tafsīr* and *ta'wīl,* were used interchangeably by early Muslim commentators to indicate methods of Quranic interpretation and commentary. Muslim scholars also made a distinction between such Quranic commentaries and 'dialectical theology' ('*ilm al-kalām*), or the science of discourse developed in Sunnism. Kalām drew upon the external meaning of the Quran and traditions and applied Aristotelian logic within the limited purpose of defending one's doctrinal position.

In contrast, Ismaili *ta'wīl* is distinct from the above two approaches. Although it is an attempt to examine and explore the symbolism of the Quran and traditions, it was not with the purpose of developing a theological system but rather was a part of the spiritual and intellectual practices to arrive at the roots of their spiritual nature. In this context, some Ismaili writers employed Neoplatonic and other mystical ideas. They applied such tools to articulate the spiritual experiences that they were undergoing. Some of them, such as Nasir Khusraw, chose to write about it but many others did not.

The practice of *ta'wīl* is especially important for the *sālikūn* (seeker or travelers on the spiritual path) in case they encounter difficulties, or when they are unsure where they stand on the path, or sometimes, when their intellect and psyche feel unresponsive, 'as if the inner heart is turned into stone.' A close modern example of *ta'wīl* as a spiritual practice can be found in Herman Hesse's Noble Prize winning book, *The Glass Bead Game* (*Magister Ludi,* 1947).

In general, modern writers on *ta'wīl* consider it as a form of speculation that attempts to uncover hidden meaning behind the literal text of the divine message. Other more philosophically attuned writers such as Corbin went a step further and consider it a very sophisticated and profound mystical and philosophical hermeneutic.

Among Sufis, it is a general belief that human existence in totality ― body, mind and soul ― are like the *āyāt* of the Holy Quran. Human existence, in its purest form, mirrors the miracles and mysteries that is the Holy Quran. Human existence is a miracle and Ismaili writers explore and meditate on human existence as an act of *ta'wīl.* Hence *ta'wīl* does not have a well-defined method; it is individualistic and each person on the path discovers her/his own method, and her/his own meaning or *ta'wīl*.

Therefore, there are no clear definitions for many of the terms used by Ismaili writers, nor did they classify

their books under any particular categories. These terms were used loosely. Madelung (1986, 203) mentions that it appears from the study of the literature that, in general, works concerning cosmology were classified under the category of *ḥaqā'iq* literature.

There is enormous diversity of ideas among Ismaili writers. The diversity of views among Ismaili writers gives an impression to people who are accustomed to rigidly structured discourse that the group is too liberal or even worse has relaxed morals. Outsiders were unable to see the inner ethical, philosophical, and imaginative structures or web of meaningful and purposeful symbols that weave the spiritual meanings that glue the community together.

Ismaili *ḥaqā'iq* literature emerged a century after the split on the question of succession after Jafar al-Sadiq. In the third/tenth century, there was a group of Ismaili *dā'īs*, mostly of Persian origin, active in Iran-Iraq and Yemen, who used Neoplatonic philosophy to expound upon religious beliefs and concepts. Ismaili thinkers, like Nasafi, Abu Hatim al-Razi, and Sijistani in Iran, and Ibn Hawshab in Yemen, "all worked out formally differing but substantially similar philosophic systems" (Hamdani, 1976, 88).

The common thread among Ismaili writers was that life emerged from a spiritual source and will return to it. Hence, Prophets and Imams appear in the material world to guide humanity through this process of return. Some of these writers, such as Abu Hatim al-Razi and Sijistani, place prophecy on a wider cosmic cyclical history propounded on Neoplatonic philosophy. Philosophy or other literary genres provided a structural and methodical framework for the interpretation of the Quran and for enhancing one's understanding of religion and the purpose of life. As Ivanow remarks,

> ...despite certain temporary "fashions" for esotericism, the Ismaili doctrine, and the literature which summed it up, always

> remained faithful to the principle that plain religion invariably overrides all esoteric speculations. .... The *ẓāhir* and *bāṭin* (both substantives, not adjectives) are inseparable, --- there is no *ẓāhir* without a corresponding *bāṭin* and vice versa. "Philosophy," that is to say, theosophy, which forms the main content of the Ismaili literature during the most brillant period of its history, the Fatimid, always had the character of superstructure. The original solid edifice of the system always remained the ordinary Shiite Islam, the difference solely being constituted by the way in which it was interpreted (Ivanow, 1963, 1-2).

It is true that Ismailis always emphasized a balance between exoteric and esoteric aspects of religion. Mainstream Ismailism never indulged in esotericism at the expense of exotericism. Historically and currently, we find that any forms of political or religious fervor were discouraged. In the case of the Qarmatians, it was political zeal infused with religious extremism, thus, it was rejected by the wider community. In the case of the Druze, there was a religious over-enthusiasm, which was found unacceptable; both groups subsequently assumed separate identities. What was accepted from other traditions became an integral part of the Ismaili system of thought. Madelung (1977, 54) states, "While its (Ismaili doctrine) core embodied general Islamic and Shī'a tenets and ideals, it integrated some of the Hellenistic spiritual and intellectual heritage, which, though mostly condemned or shunned by more conservative Sunni scholars, had indubitably become part of Islamic civilization."

The Influence of Neo-Platonism on Ismaili Thought

The expansion of Muslim culture and civilization, which began in the first century of Islam, brought the emerging religious community face to face with a variety

of ideas and cultures and Muslims developed interest in the cultures and heritages of other nations. One of these contacts was with the philosophical heritage of ancient Greece. Translations of literature from Greek and Syriac into Arabic accelerated the process of assimilation and appropriation.

Scholars translated philosophical and literary works into Arabic during the reign of Harun al-Rashid (786-809 CE). Following him, al-Mamun (reigned 813-833 CE) patronized extensive works of translation through his newly established institution, *Dār al-Ḥikmah* (Hourani, 1985, 90). Through these translations, Muslims became acquainted with the works of Greek philosophers such as Pythagoras (580—500 B.C.), Plato (427—347 B.C.), Aristotle (384—322 B.C.), and later philosophers such as Plotinus (204—269 A.D.). Besides these philosophers, Muslim scholars knew about many other philosophers of antiquity such as Socrates (469 — 399 B.C.) and Parmenides (5th Century B.C.).

These scholarly activities encouraged many philosophers and scientists to move to the central Islamic lands. There was the migration of philosophers from Alexandria to Antioch in the reign of Umar II (717-720), from Antioch to Harrān under Mutawakkil (847-61), and to Baghdad under Mutadid bi-llah (892-902) (Hourani, 1985). Parts of the *Enneads* of Plotinus (wrongly ascribed to Aristotle) were translated into Arabic and exerted significant influence on the development of Islamic philosophical thought (Hourani, 1985).

Neoplatonic philosophy was one of the most powerful factors in the internal evolution of Islamic ideas. Traces of Neo-Platonism can be found as early as the beginning of second/eight century. Richard Frank has studied the Neoplatonic structure in the thought of the theologian, Jahm ibn Safwan (d. 745). His study reveals some form of direct contact with Neoplatonic thought (Frank, 1965). Showing the extent of its influence, Goldziher (1981, 219)

mentions, "The ideas of this philosophical system affected Muslims of the most varied descriptions, and even found their way into documents in which the unassailably orthodox doctrines of Islam were put forward."

Ismaili thinkers drew from the corpora of Greek heritage, especially from the Pythagorean and Platonic traditions and their latter development in the hands of Gnostics and Hellenistic writers. Corbin (1986; 1957) also pointed out the influence of Iranian thought on Ismaili writers. In the Pythagorean tradition, philosophy was based on the significance of numbers (Guthrie, 1967), which influenced the early development of Ismaili thought. The symbolism of numbers continued to remain a part of Ismaili theosophy, with varying degrees of emphasis, in different periods of Ismaili history.

Early Ismaili writings such as those by Ibn Hawshab and the Ismaili inspired encyclopedic works of the Ikhwan al-Safa (Brethren of Sincerity) demonstrate the influence of the Pythagorean philosophy of numbers. In fact, early Ismailis were known as Seveners due to their emphasis on the significance of the number seven in their doctrine. This theme of numbers runs through the *Rasa'il* of the Ikhwan who considered themselves affiliated with the Pythagorean school of thought (Netton, 1982, 10).

Some prominent Ismaili writers, such as Nasafi, Sijistani, and Abu Hatim al-Razi show greater interest in Neoplatonic philosophy than Pythagorean thought. Ismaili writers utilized many complex elements accrued from Greek, Iranian, and Indian traditions. At their core, they were traditional scholars who relied heavily upon the Quran and Muslim traditions to explain their views on religion. The importance of Ismaili writings lies in their attempt to reconcile all these diverse elements and bring them together into a relatively coherent system of thought.

The Ismaili thinkers were at par with other scholars in their attempts to understand the relationship between religion and individuals as well as society. W. Madelung

remarks, "Ismaili theology was revelational, rather than rational in its very core" (1977, 56). According to him, the Ismaili writers selectively drew from Greco-Iranian traditions. He states, "Ismaili doctrine did not borrow indiscriminately but rather selected what it found congenial to its basic convictions and amalgamated it into a coherent synthesis of its own" (1977, 56).

Thus, Ismaili scholars opposed sheer rational philosophy that could lead to atheism or agnosticism because they believed that the basis of knowledge is the divine revelation. They always advocated learning through an authoritative teacher. An intellect, set on the journey to investigate into matters of profound temporal and spiritual significance, must derive its inspiration from a divine source, or else it may risk going astray from the true path. Sijistani, criticizing the general populace, reproaches them, "You appointed Mamun as a caliph, who squandered the Muslim treasury in translating the materialist atheist Greek books of philosophy whose result is the denial of the prophecy of Muhammad and resurrection after death" (Sijistani, 1980, 40).

Abu Hatim also expresses his fear of the dire consequences of rationalist investigation:

> When a person is engaged in this investigation and is not content with the *Sharīʻah*, the matters of *Tawḥīd,* and the subtleties of the esoteric sciences (*laṭā'if al-ʻulūm al-ḥaqīqīyah*), he is wonder-struck and this leads him to heresy and makes his path the path of those who have gone astray and are known through philosophy (1977, 279).

Therefore, revelation became the very basis of Ismaili thought. One of the reasons that Ismaili writers accepted Neoplatonic philosophy was due to its profound mystical message and affirmation of the principle of *Tawḥīd*, the most fundamental Islamic doctrine. W. Madelung,

pointing out this remarkable feature of Ismaili doctrine, states, “The attractiveness of Neoplatonic theology to Ismaili thought was in part no doubt due to its rigorous affirmation of the Unity, the Perfect Oneness, of Allah and His absolute transcendence” (Madelung 1977, 57).

The two basic complementary elements of Neo-Platonism were the concept of emanation and the hierarchy that emerged therefrom. Plotinus formulated a hierarchy of three cosmic principles responsible for the creation of the world of generation and corruption. These three principals were the One, the Intellect, and the Soul. Arabic sources define the One as, “...the First Light (*al-nūr al-awwal*), the Light of the lights (*Nūr al-anwār*), [that] has no end, no discontinuity. Its light does not decline, and it illuminates the Intellectual world eternally” (al-Badawi, 1955, 119).

Plotinus's doctrine is full of mystical allegories and symbols. For him, the rational attainment of the knowledge of the One is impossible. “The One is undefinable, and in regard to it, there is more truth in silence than in any words whatever” (Russell, 1964, 288). The second principle is the Intellect (*noûs*), which is the image of the One. It is engendered because “the One, in its self-quest, has vision; this seeing is *noûs”* (Russell, 1964, 289). Plotinus does not find any essential difference in the essences of the two. This Intellect issued forth the third member of the hypostasis ― the Soul.

The relationship between the three hypostases in Plotinus is one of hierarchical distinction in unity. “The One and the Intellect are always present to the Soul and acting on it, and this eternal presence and action is the most important thing which we (who are Soul) discover in philosophical reflection” (Armstrong, 1967, 250). “The Soul is the author of the sublunary world, i.e. the visible, material world” (Plotinus, 1956, 375). “This soul has duality; there is [the] inner soul intent on *noûs* and another, which faces the external. The latter is associated with a

downward movement, in which the Soul generates its image, which is Nature and the world of senses" (Russell, 1964, 291).

Plotinus projected the image of the Universal Soul as something full of energy and continuously active. This activity has dual aspects. One aspect of the activity is towards its originator and a second is towards the creation of the world. The Universal Soul "ceaselessly 'looks' towards the Intellectual Principle, while, of its lavish energy, it creates the world, "down to the lowest form of being in the visible world" (Mackenna, 1956, xxvii). The origination of the second and the third from the first is through the process of emanation.

Plotinus uses the allegory of the Sun constantly pouring forth light. As the distance from the center of the Sun increases, darkness emerges; similarly, as the distance from the One who is pure light increases, darkness comes into existence and that darkness is matter. This process simultaneously generates a hierarchical structure in creation, which means that those who are closer to the One have more light and less darkness or contamination and are higher in the hierarchy. For Plotinus, the world is not evil, contrary to the belief of Gnostics (Russell, 1964, 291). What is considered as evil is nothing but the darkness that is the result of distance from the Divine Source. In this schema, Plotinus structures a well-ordered Cosmos, which is in motion in order to achieve the divine purpose.

Classical Neo-Platonism underwent significant changes in the hands of later philosophers and its assimilation into Islamic tradition was in a modified form. Corbin notes that the form of Neo-Platonism that is found among Ismailis, "was not the same as known and discovered by modern scholars but as it was developed probably by the successors of Plotinus and received in the form of translations into Arabic" (Corbin, 1358 AH, 54). Ismaili writers found the Neo-Platonic explanation of creation attractive because it visually explained an

extremely difficult concept and it fit well with the Ismaili *Imāmah* and *da'wah* structure, i.e. the continuity of divine guidance, and most importantly the divinely inspired person on earth.

Ismaili philosophers did not show consistency in applying various features of Neo-Platonism. Several of them developed their own unique interpretations and styles to apply Neoplatonic ideas. For example, most Ismaili thinkers "did not endorse the Neoplatonic notion of emanation from the One" (Madelung, 1961, 43). Ismailis considered this to fall short of the concept of pure *Tawḥīd.* Ismaili thinkers asserted pure *Tawḥīd* by elevating Allah transcending all forms of cognition and levels of creation. Sijistani, using the dialectic of double negation, states that "He transcends Being and non-Being, even pure ipseity cannot be attributed to Him" (Sijistani, 1961, 15). Sijistani alludes here to the difficulty of expressing the concept of *Tawḥīd*.

Sijistani describes an Ismaili narrative on creation whereby the cause of the creation of the world is that the Soul (*al-nafs*) had the yearning (*shahwa*) to reach the Intellect (*al-'aql*) and this yearning created motion and such movement created the world. She did not know what would befall upon her when she appears in the world. When she was creating the world, she was confused by the agitation in matter and chaotic motion. She was unable to do what she had intended (Sijistani, 1961)

Ibn Abi al-Hadid (d. 1258) states that ancient philosophers as well as Abu Hatim al-Razi held that "the reason Allah created the world was to inform the soul that what she desires is impossible to achieve until she ceases to love 'matter' and returns to her previous stage" (Ibn Abi al-Hadid, 1959, I:159). This statement of al-Hadid is in agreement with Abu Hatim's account of the soul's fall except that Abu Hatim states that the Soul created the world with the assistance of Allah. The Creator out of His mercy helped her in the creation of the world (Abu Hatim,

1977). Ibn Abi al-Hadid and Abu Hatim report that the purpose of Allah in letting her create the world, despite implicit problems, is that she should have direct knowledge of evil, which would stop her from loving the world.

Sijistani in *Kitāb Ithbāt al-Nubuwwah* describes *al-mubdi'* or *dhāt al-bārī* as Beyond Being, Transcending Being or as the Mystery of the mysteries (*ghayb al-ghayyūb*) (Corbin, 1358 a.h., 112-3). To offset the idea of emanation that makes the Creator and the creation qualitatively the same, “Ismaili scholars introduced the notion of *ibdā*‘ an eternal, timeless existenciation” (Walker, 1974, 82) through the mediation of the *Kalimah* (the Word). Pines compared the cosmology developed by Ismaili writers and the Neoplatonic epistle, The *Longer Theology*. He found similarities regarding the concept of the "Word" found in the Longer Theology with the corresponding ideas expressed by Ismaili writers (Pines, 1954, 7-20). This is a significant departure from the Neoplatonic view of sequential direct emanation. This intermediary saves the Originator from being similar to the Intellect, though it is "perfect in act" (Shahrastani, 1968, I, 193). The introduction of the intermediary *kalimah,* the Word, or *amr,* the Divine Command, gives the schema an Islamic spiritual context (Madelung, 1977, 56).

Ensuring the purity of Allah, Ismaili thinkers envisaged the rest of the celestial and temporal world through the process of *inbi'āth* (emanation). Paul Walker defines *inbi'āth* as "the eruption of a living, moving thing from something solid and quiescent as water might spring from some mountain source" (1974, 85). *Inbi'āth* makes the creation distinct from the Creator.

Ismaili thinkers used the idea of hierarchical creation to explain the cosmos, as well as their da‘wah organization and operation, by creating parallels between the order of the Cosmos and the order of religion. However, it does not mean that there was a single coherent and uniform doctrine

or system of philosophy within Ismailism. In fact, as discussed earlier, the controversy instigated between Abu Hatim and Nasafi, and discussed by later writers, shows that they were individual thinkers and researchers. Hence, individual variations remain detectable in this process. Further, one might emphasize that there was no such thing as a single "official" doctrine and a single philosophical system among the Ismailis.

During the Fatimid period, that could be characterized as having a well-organized and centrally controlled da‘wah, we still find a variety of different trends emerging and vanishing with different caliph-Imams and influenced by the person heading the da‘wah. Such was the case even within the regions under the direct control of the Fatimid caliph, not to mention the distant regions far from the Fatimid Empire, where there was no effective control.

Ismailis never developed a solid, systematic theology or doctrine. Often, modern scholars of Ismaili studies take the models of doctrinal or theological developments in Sunnism or Twelver Shi‘ism and perceive these within the works of Ismaili writers. The only doctrinal consistency that is found in Ismaili thought and literature are the three core beliefs, namely, *Tawḥīd*, *Nubuwwah,* and *Imāmah*. Even interpretations of these core concepts are not consistent.

The Ismaili Tariqah never had a corpus of doctrines or set of beliefs, except those given by the Imam of the time. Ismaili authors never claimed that their interpretations or doctrinal expositions were official. These were personal interpretations. A general belief is that the Imam of the time guides murids exoterically in the rational understanding of faith and esoterically in spiritual growth. His external and internal guidance and *barakah* enables murids to explore those concepts and truths intellectually and spiritually.

Ismaili thinkers wrote independently on these concepts. In general, they had a *laissez faire* attitude to

their own literature. Nothing comprised as the definitive interpretations of the faith. In other words, Ismailis are individualistic and they choose and interpret faith individually. Contrary to what western scholars believe, Ismailis did not have a fixed theology or doctrine. It is erroneous to say about any period of Ismaili history that they collectively interpreted such and such concept this way or that. The three core concepts, *Tawḥīd*, *Nubuwwah,* and *Imāmah* comprised the totality of commonly held beliefs.

The primary source for their religious guidance always has been directly from the Imam of the time, whether they were in direct contact with their Imam or not. The rest is the individual search for interpretation. If an Ismaili scholar speaks, he or she speaks for himself or herself. Their writings do not form a doctrine or theology. Ismailis are, what the Aga Khan III calls, "*ibn al- waqt"* (children of the time) (Jairazbhoy, 1937, 14), potential mystics who are guided by their spiritual impulses and their spiritual master, the Imam of the time, whose guidance and *barakah* are the only sources of knowledge and bliss on the path; the rest is chaff.

Other interesting aspects of Ismaili thought are the notions of spiritual journey, human destiny, and mystical knowledge. By the end of the third century, Islamic mysticism had become a discipline in itself. There was some form of interaction between Sufism and Ismailism (Massignon, 1982, 200-4) although it is difficult to assess the extent of exchange of mystical ideas. Certainly, the patterns in the growth of Ismaili ideas were different from early ascetical and devotional Sufism.

Ismailism developed diverse forms of intellectual trends and their mystical and literary traditions often had local flavors and regional spheres of influences. No particular mystical or intellectual trend could be considered as the universal Ismaili tradition. For some Ismaili writers such as Ibn Hawshab, political and

philosophical components became an integral part of mystical tendencies. In contemporary times, for example, social justice is an important aspect of the mystical consciousness of an Ismaili seeker.

A major difference between Ismailism and Sufism was the former's belief in *Imāmah*. *Imāmah* is hereditary and the Imam of the time plays a profound role in the lives of his murids. In Shi‘ism, the role of an Imam is not merely eschatological but is also socio-political. We see this throughout the early history of Shi‘ism where on the one hand, an *Imam* guides a neophyte towards his spiritual path and on the other hand, he is engaged in the social and cultural lives of his followers. The first Imam, ‘Ali ibn Abi Talib could be seen as the prototype of these roles. The present Imam, Shah Karim al-Husayni, the Aga Khan IV, explains his position and role by stating,

> What does it mean to become an Imam in the tradition? To begin with, it is an inherited role of spiritual leadership. As you may know, the Ismailis are the only Muslim community that has been led by a living, hereditary Imam in direct descent from Prophet Muhammad (Jodidi Lecture, 2015).

In the same lecture, he further explains his role succinctly,

> That spiritual role however, does not imply a separation from practical responsibilities. In fact, for Muslims the opposite is true: the spiritual and material worlds are inextricably connected. Leadership in the spiritual realm — for all Imams, whether they are Sunni or Shia — implies responsibility in worldly affairs; a calling to improve the quality of human life (Jodidi Lecture, 2015).

In the Ismaili Tariqah, the individual search for meaning is important. However, an intellectual

understanding of the key concepts, such as *Tawḥīd*, *Nubuwwah*, and *Imāmah*, is essential for the believer; furthermore, these concepts must be experienced at a higher level of consciousness. Hence, the expressions and articulation of those experiences are individual and multiple. Therefore, interpretations that emerge from such knowledge and experiences reflect diversity. There is no enforcement of a single interpretation or doctrine. There are multiple ways of understanding and experiencing faith; each individual in different times and places and under varied circumstances could experience faith in a number of ways and forms. The Ismaili Tariqah allows broader spaces for such experiences to take place.

In this respect, Sijistani develops an interesting argument that radically differentiates a prophet from the rest of the creation. Sijistani considered that each species, besides having a common substance (*jawhar*) with the rest of creation, also has a unique quality that makes it distinct from others. Hence, in the hierarchy of creation, each higher species includes all the features that the lower species has. In addition, it contains a characteristic that is not found in the lower ones; that unique feature is the differentia that gives it a higher status. These differences exist in each species, such as the quality of ‘growth’ (*nāmī*) in plants, which distinguishes them from minerals; in animals, vitality (*ḥaywah*) that makes them superior to plants; and in human beings speech (*nuṭq*) which gives them a dominant position over animals and the creation below them (Sijistani, 1949, 70-71).

For Sijistani, these inner dispositions of each species are not acquired but are intrinsic to the species and are inseparable from them. Hence, none of these categories can transcend their natural status, nor can they be transmuted into another mode or form of creation.

From this line of argument, he establishes the unique position and un-acquirable status of Prophecy. He states that prophecy is an inner disposition of a prophet.

Although a prophet shares all his characteristics with other human beings, he also belongs to a category of specially gifted human beings. “The quality which makes the class of prophets distinct from and superior to, the rest of human beings is the element of "the sacred" (*quds*) (1949*,* 15). The prophets (*al-anbiyā'*) have nobility (*sharaf*) and superiority (*fadl*) over humanity by virtue of the ‘given power’ (*ta'yīd*) and the ‘descended support’ bestowed upon them from the Holy (*quds*). Due to this ‘power’, they are granted leadership and sway over humanity; hence, (the ‘power’) is absent from (the common) person who is incapable (‘*ājiz*) of being the recipient of it. Humans are totally subservient and subjugated to their (prophets’) commands (*aḥkām*) and their policies (*siyāsah*)” (1949, 15).

Explaining how and why Prophets are chosen for such a status and task, Sijistani thinks that the 'grace' (*ta'yīd* — *support*) from above is not sent to a chosen few but dawns upon each and every soul. The souls of prophets receive the most due to their inner purity. He states that in the terrestrial world, each individual soul (*al-nafs al-juz'iyah*) receives benefit (*ifāḍah*) from the *Tālī*, (the Universal Soul) according to its inner characteristics. Each soul differs from others in respect to its indulgence in the corruption and pollution of the world, but there are some purified and unpolluted souls, who have a harmonious inner disposition and accept the outflow (*ifāḍah*) from the Universal Soul to a greater extent. They become “the Purified Chosen” (*al-ṣafīyah al-muṣṭafā*) who receive imprints (*āthār*) from the Tālī (1966, 53 & 55; 1949, 71). Thus, “The cause (‘*ilah*) is within the soul of the messenger (*nafs al-Rasūl*)” (1966, 55).

In this regard, Abu Hatim and Sijistani are in accord with each other. For both of them, it is the harmonious, balanced, and unpolluted soul of a prophet, which makes him eligible to receive the ‘grace’ from the *Quds*. Although Abu Hatim does not use the term *Quds,* he does

consider ‘Aql and Tālī as responsible for granting prophets with special favors (Abu Hatim, *Iṣlāḥ,* 47-8). Prophets are born pure with a balanced nature. These qualities cannot be acquired. It is contrary to the view of the philosophers who generally believed that inner purity could be achieved only through philosophical investigation. According to Abu Bakr, “... the soul (*al-nafs*) is not purified from the filth (*kadūrah*) of this world and delivered (*tatakhallaṣa*) to another, except by investigation (*bi'l-naẓar*) in philosophy” (Abu Hatim, 1977, 12).

This position of the philosophers is not acceptable to Ismaili writers. For them, the human intellect, unaided by the divine guidance, can lead people astray into atheism (1977, 279). A basic distinction between the views of Abu Hatim and Abu Bakr al-Razi is that Abu Hatim believed that the prophets represent a class of people with special innate characteristics. Other human beings can acquire knowledge and spiritual benediction from these Prophets. Prophets are appointed as mediators between Allah and humanity. On the other hand, philosophers like Abu Bakr think that all human beings can achieve that inner purity and knowledge through investigation in philosophical matters.

Through Sijistani's arguments, one reaches the conclusion that the prophets are not like ordinary people. They are as distinct from human beings, as human beings are distinct and different from animals or other species. In this manner, Sijistani postulates a radical definition and excludes all possibilities that might suggest Prophethood could be acquired. He suggests that the prophets have an inner disposition, which enables them to receive the element of the ‘holy’ within them.

Hamid al-Din Kirmani (d. 411/1021) in his *Al-aqwāl al-dhahabīyah,* addresses the issue of prophecy as debated by Abu Hatim and considers Abu Hatim al-Razi’s reply as satisfactory but incomplete (1977, 14-5). Kirmani thinks that there could be more than one reason for a person to be

selected as a prophet by Allah (1977*,* 15). He bases his argument on the principles of 'purpose' and 'difference.' He argues,

> ...whatever has been created by Allah, every part of the visible sensory macrocosm (*al-'alam al-kabīr al-jismānī al-mar'iy al-maḥsūs*), is selected for a particular assignment, and is helpless to do otherwise. These functions also create distinctions among various species as well as the members of the same species. Thus, there is the human species that has been distinguished with the intellect ('*aql*) and is given superiority over the species of wild animals and birds. Similarly, within the human species, Prophets and *A'immah* are given superiority (*fāḍilah*) so that humans can turn to them (1977*,* 16-7).

The reason behind the superiority of prophets is that they are given knowledge. Allah created human beings without knowledge. Kirmani states, "When Allah, the exalted, created human beings, the human was devoid of knowledge (*ma'arif*) and the mind (*ma'alim*) was empty. As the Lord of the worlds says in the noble Book, "Allah brought you forth from the wombs of your mothers, you knew nothing" (1977, 17). Since humans were unable to achieve knowledge by themselves, God entrusts prophets with the responsibility to teach them what they need.

This view of Ismaili writers is contrary to the views of philosophers like Ibn Tufayl and Abu Bakr al-Razi, who thought that it is possible to acquire knowledge without a teacher. In Ibn Tufayl's *Ḥayy ibn Yaqẓān* (1968), this theme runs through the story that a human being is capable of achieving the highest forms of knowledge without any formal learning or teacher, through the process of self-discovery and contemplation (Hasanali, 1995).

Ismaili writers were not always in agreement with each other over philosophical issues. There are difference of opinions between Sijistani and Kirmani. Sijistani held the Platonic view that the human soul has innate knowledge which prophets awaken through their teachings whereas Kirmani held the view that a human being lacks innate knowledge and prophets and Imams impart it to human beings (1977, 17). This role of a prophet is similar to that of a spiritual master who leads his disciple towards the actualization of higher spiritual knowledge.

Kirmani, like other Ismaili writers, also attributed a sociopolitical role to a Prophet. He bases his argument on the attributes of ethics and social justice. He notes, "a person has an urge for power (*riyāsah*), an inclination towards tyranny (*ḍulm*), domination, and love for wealth and prosperity. Thus, in order that the powerful do not persecute the weak and people are protected, it was necessary to establish law and have a leader among the people who can protect them" (1977*,* 17). The divinely appointed prophet, being devoid of such weaknesses, fulfills that need.

Like all Ismaili philosophers, Kirmani's major concern is also the eschatological destiny of humanity. For him, this can be achieved by realizing the potentiality within the human soul, through a prophet or an Imam. He states, "Allah created from the soul of human being (*nafs al-bashar*) a 'potentially existing intellect' ('*aql qā'im bi al-quwwah*). Philosophically, whatever is in potentiality should move to actuality" (1977, 17). One needs education and training to bring the intellect into actuality, to make it reach its perfection and make it the active intellect. For this reason, the prophets were chosen among people for revelation and nobility (*fāḍilah*) (1977*,* 18). Prophets and Imams provide what an individual and society need to achieve order and peace in society and enable them to discover individual potential or innermost spiritual truths.

Ismaili Writers on Prophecy

The cosmology of Ismaili writers was based on the dichotomy of the higher (*al-'ulwī*) and the lower (*al-suflī*) worlds. In the higher or spiritual world, there is a hierarchy of spiritual beings, i.e., intellects. The first among them is the Intellect (*al*-'*aql,* also called *al-sābiq*) originating from the Originator (*mubdi*'); then came the Second Creation (*al-khalq al-thāni*), otherwise known as the soul (*al-nafs*, or *al-tālī*). The other members of the celestial hierarchy were created from these two. Kirmani made some changes to this scheme and introduced a hierarchy of the ten Intellects on the Farabian pattern. He follows Abu Hatim in establishing the dichotomy of the two worlds, *al-'ālam al-'ulwī* and *al-'ālam al-suflī.* However, Kirmani's scheme of ten intellects in the celestial world and corresponding hierarchy in the world of religion (*'ālam al-dīn*) required the redefinition of roles and functions of each of these *hudūd* (ranks in da'wah*)*. Nevertheless, the basic religio-political functions of the members of the hierarchy remain more or less the same (Kirmani, 1953). Cyclical time connects both these worlds (Corbin, 1964). In each higher rank, the *ḥadd* is the master over the lower *ḥadd*.

Ḥadd literally means 'limit' and has been used in different contexts such as astronomical, theological, and juridical etc. In the Ismaili context, it "would have meant defined and graded authorities of different ranks, both in the Cosmos and in religio-political organization of da'wah" (Hamdani, 1976, 87). The concept of *ḥadd* in Ismaili thought has dual meaning and purpose:

1) It defines the limits of authority and functions in the organizational, socio-political and religious context;
2) In an esoteric sense, it indicates spiritual status and eschatological function. It is a masculine principle emanating benefit (*fayḍ*), and every lower *ḥadd* is a feminine principle,

which receives benefit and issues forth the lower creation, or *ḥadd* (Corbin, 1983).

According to this scheme, every higher *ḥadd* is a masculine principle for the lower one and each lower one is a feminine principle for the higher one and the masculine principle for the one below it. This celestial hierarchy is also responsible for the creation of the sublunary world where the hierarchical structure continues to exist. The early Ismaili teachers found a mutual interactive relationship among various kingdoms (*mawālid*) such as minerals, plants, animals, and humans.

The Ismaili *dā'īs* systematically used the Neoplatonic cosmological structure and fit it into their interpretation of prophecy, especially in the organization of the da'wah. Hamdani remarks, "The Fatimid mission was organized as an earthly replica of the cosmological hierarchy of the universe, developed from a particular theory of creation" (Hamdani, 1976, 88).

Cyclical History and the Hierarchy of Prophets

The earliest surviving Ismaili work dealing with doctrinal issues probably is Ibn Hawshab's *Kitāb al-Rushd wa al-Hidāyah*. According to Ibn Hawshab's theory, there are seven *Nuṭaqā'*. (Enunciator Prophets) each of whom introduces a new Sharī'ah (religious path). The last *Nāṭiq* is called *mutimm* (one who completes) with reference to Muhammad, or the expected Mahdi (Hamdani, 1976, 89). The Nāṭiq has a *Waṣī* who is succeeded by a series of seven Imams. Then, each Imam has officers under him who are called *ḥujjah*, or are also known as *nāqīb (*pl. *nuqabā)* or *bāb* (pl. *abwāb)*.

According to the theory, each prophet's mission of establishing the religious path (*sharī'ah*) is carried on after him by his divinely appointed successor. These successors are seven in number. They interpret the divine message and unfold its esoteric meaning until another prophet appears with a new Sharī'ah. For Ibn Hawshab, this

historical process continued until the sixth in the series of seven Nāṭiq, i.e., Prophet Muhammad appeared and perfected the process of the plain revelation (*tanzīl*). The last in the series, the *Qā'im*, will make public the inner secrets of the Sharī'ah, which were previously available only to the initiated few. Nasafi and Abu Hatim also developed the conceptual framework in their own ways influenced by Neo-Platonism (Walker, 1974).

The early Ismaili literature was meant for Ismaili readers and had a restricted circulation and audience. Several Ismaili writers discussed the cyclical concept of history. Abu Hatim al-Razi elaborates the concept of Prophethood on the edifice of the Neoplatonic philosophical structure. The entire philosophical system was fashioned around the purpose and meaning of creation. "Ismaili teachings from its beginnings offered a comprehensive and coherent view of Allah, the universe, and the meaning of history" (Madelung, 1977, 54).

According to Ismaili Neo-Platonists, the appearance of Prophets is essentially a part of cosmic history and the divine plan. It was an urge for fulfillment, innate in the *nafs*, which brought about action in the cosmic drama. It recurs repeatedly until the final destiny is reached. Shahrastani (469/1076-548/1153), in describing Ismaili cosmology, stated,

> When the (Universal) Soul longed to reach the perfection of the Intellect, it required movement from deficiency to perfection, and for the movement it required an instrument of motion. Thus, the Universal Soul created the spheres of heaven, planned the soul's journey, and put in cyclical motion (1968, 193-4).

The mystical quest, which pervades the whole history of humanity and is the purpose and meaning of creation for Ismaili writers, becomes a matter of immediate

concern, a need to be looked into constantly. The urge to discover the origin is present in souls and it manifest itself in various forms in one's life. For the Universal Soul, creation was the creative act; in individual souls, it may reveal itself as creativity in art, music, poetry, or other forms.

Individuals are often unable to decipher the reasons behind the restlessness of their souls. Individual souls lack consciousness about their origin and their heedlessness is deepened by their limited knowledge and preoccupation with sensory experiences. Therefore, Prophets are sent to awaken their dormant consciousness and spiritual impulses. Prophets guide human beings to their spiritual destiny and through grace awaken their consciousness. Thus, prophets were sent to look after this most profound yet widely ignored or forgotten need of human beings. Hence, Prophet Muhammad is named the 'reminder' (*mudhakir*) in the Quran. Similarly, the spiritual practice that awakens such consciousness is called '*dhikr',* or remembrance.

The world of religion ('*ālam al-dīn*), which is the replica of the actual cosmic structure, order and meaning, was established to fulfill such a human need. This indicates the universal character, unifying meaning, and transcendent purpose in the messages of apparently different religions. This holistic and humanistic approach gives Ismailism a unique character among various religio-philosophical disciplines of the medieval period.

There is an important distinction between linear history and cyclical history. Linear history indicates an end in the future. Cyclical history indicates the continuous movement of time. Cyclical history makes the end of the physical world irrelevant. Its focus remains on the continuous struggle of the human soul to achieve its spiritual destiny. According to the idea of cyclical history, events recur in a rotating manner and the periods of prophets alternate with each other. The cyclical motion of

history progressively perfects and unfolds the divine message for humanity.

According to Sijistani, there are two types of cycles. The great cycle (*al-dawr al-kabīr*) (Sijistani, 1966, 184) begins with the first messenger, Adam and ends with the advent of the *Qā'im*, who is the seventh and last *Nāṭiq*. Abu Hatim mentions six 'enunciator prophets' who brought the Sharī'ah. Each one of them had drawn upon the customs and traditions of religion, and provided what was required for their nations to achieve salvation. The first of the Nāṭiq was Adam who drew from the exoteric and esoteric customs of religion, and the final among them will be the *Qā'im*, although Muhammad was the last to bring a Sharī'ah with him. The *Qā'im* will only reveal the esoteric meaning of the Sharī'ah.

The role and function of the first Nāṭiq was controversial in early Ismailism. In Ismaili terminology, it means those prophets who brought the Sharī'ah (Abu Hatim, *Iṣlāḥ,* f.54). Abu Hatim distinguishes between a Nāṭiq and *ul al-'aẓm* messengers. For him, Adam was a Nāṭiq who brought the Sharī'ah and performed all the functions of a messenger by pronouncing the Sharī'ah in accordance with the needs of the people of his time. However, he is not among the *ul al-'aẓm* Prophets because he did not abrogate any Sharī'ah (since there was no prophet before him). Thus, *ul al-'aẓm* is one who abrogates the Sharī'ah of the previous messenger (Abu Hatim*, Iṣlāḥ,* f.58). According to Abu Hatim, this means that there are six lawgiver prophets and five *ul al-'aẓm* prophets. He states,

> There are five masters of the resolution (*ul al-'aẓm*). The first among them is Noah because he is the first who abrogated the *Sharī'ah* and the customs of Adam, detached people from it, and gave them what he had brought with him (f. 58).

Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, Jesus, and Muhammad were the six-lawgiver prophets. The first messenger with resolution (*al-'aẓm*) is Noah and the last is Muhammad, because there is no Nāṭiq after him and his Sharī'ah is linked with *al-qiyāmah*. It is interesting to note that at times Abu Hatim does not include the *Qā'im* in either of these two categories, as do other Ismaili writers, such as Sijistani. According to Abu Hatim, *al-Qā'im* does not bring a new Sharī'ah so he is at times excluded from the list of the *nuṭaqā*'. He is not included in the list of *ul al-'aẓm* since he will not abrogate the Sharī'ah.

Ismaili writers are unanimous on the status of Muhammad as the last Prophet and the one who completed the great cycle of Prophets who brought laws and the revelation. For example, in agreement with Abu Hatim al-Razi, Sijistani states that "Muhammad was the last messenger and he perfected the *Sharī'ah* and brought the great cycle to perfection" (Sijistani, 1966, 184-5). Abu Hatim considers the progressive perfection of the revelation as emerging from potentiality into actuality within cyclical history. This perfection was achieved by Muhammad; he is indeed the last Prophet of the cycle by virtue of this perfection (Abu Hatim, *Iṣlāḥ*, f.59). Thus, the role of the *Qā'im* is not to bring a new Sharī'ah by abrogating the last one, but to disclose its inner meaning. In this way, he completes the *dawr* (cycle). Hence, the period that will be inaugurated by the *Qā'im* will be based on the inner meaning of the Sharī'ah.

The small cycle (*al-dawr al-saghīr*) is a cycle between two messengers. Each small cycle has seven Imams, whose responsibility is to carry on the message of the Prophet of the period by interpretation and application within society. Muhammad is the prophet of the final cycle. The gap between the last revelation and the appearance of the *Qā'im* is filled by the permanent, unbroken chain of Imams. As Sijistani indicates, "In the cycle of Muhammad, there are numerous Imams and the

succession of these Imams will continue till the rising of the *Qā'im*" (1966, 182).

In this instance, Ismaili writers make a distinction between the cycles of Enunciator Prophets (*nuṭaqā'*) and the *Qā'im.* The period which Adam started is considered as the 'Period of Occultation' (*al-dawr al-satr*). It is the period of six Enunciator Prophets, in which the Sharī'ah is obligatory on people and the *bāṭin* is concealed beneath the external message. The spiritual truths (*ḥaqā'iq al-ruḥānīyah*) are reduced to silence and disclosed only to those who are initiated, since the human soul (in and of itself) is incapable of responding to the call (*da'wah*). According to Abu Hatim, "As the daylight conceals the light of the stars, similarly, the exoteric aspect of Sharī'ah, like the daylight, conceals its inner status and wisdom, which is like the night. The plain words are like curtains" (Abu Hatim, *Iṣlāḥ,* f.62).

The period of the *Qā'im* is the 'Cycle of Epiphany' (*dawr al-kashf*). In this cycle, "the *Qā'im* opens up all the hidden esoteric wisdom of the revealed messages" (Sijistani, 1966, 181-2). It appears that the role of the *Qā'im* is the integration of all religious messages. He also assumes all ecclesiastical functions, which were previously ascribed to various *ḥudūd al-dīn*. The *ḥudūd* and functions are not required after the proclamation of the *qiyāmah*. The structural and normative orders are completely changed. The *Qā'im* not only consummates all *ḥudūd* within himself but he also interweaves the whole corpora of the Sharī'ah together into one singular meaning. In other words, this idea is associated with the transcendental unity of religions. Each Sharī'ah has distinct features to meet the needs of the people to whom it is addressed. However, Abu Hatim in *A'lām* (1977) maintains that the inner meaning is the same. Thus, when the *Qā'im* exposes the inner meaning, he, in fact, brings out the universal and unifying meaning, which transcends all apparent contradictions or disagreements.

Abu Hatim al-Razi, along with other Ismaili thinkers of his time, considered the role of the *Qā'im* to be important yet distinct from the role of the Prophets. From such a point of view, the *Qā'im* is ascribed with an eschatological role. He actually stands for the eschatological destiny of the human collective and the highest spiritual stage that can be achieved in this world. This function does not come into conflict with the mission of the prophets. The esoteric meaning of the Sharī'ah *is* another dimension of the Sharī'ah; both are indispensable to each other. Defining the position of the *Qā'im*, Abu Hatim states, "The master of the seventh cycle does not compile a Sharī'ah, which has curtains of plain words. He is the master of the epiphany (*ṣāḥib al-kashf*). He is unique and distinct from the five or six" (Abu Hatim, *Iṣlāḥ,* f.61). (Five refers to *ul al-'aẓm* Prophets and six refers to Nuṭaqā').

The six masters (*aṣḥāb*) of the Sharī'ah nourish the spiritual form (*al-ṣuwar al-ruḥānīyah*) and the seventh collects all of them together. The seventh of these small cycles — the Cycle of the cycles (*dawr al-adwār*) — is actualized (*bi al-fā'il*) and not potential (*lā bi al-quwwah*) (*Iṣlāḥ*, f.59). This statement implies that during the time of six Enunciators, various aspects of human spirituality are nourished and when the *Qā'im* comes, he encompasses all these forms, metaphorically and completes the picture. In other words, human beings' spiritual potentialities are transformed into actuality. This collective spiritual and intellectual maturity, consequently, brings about a paradisiacal state on earth.

The role of Sharī'ah is to actualize the spiritual potentialities of human beings by establishing norms and a comprehensive educational process; human beings continue to advance from one stage to another to achieve intellectual and spiritual maturity. At the stage of *qiyāmah*, humans are exposed to the complete esoteric dimension of the Sharī'ah as a reward for abiding by the exoteric

Sharīʻah. In a profound mystical statement, Sijistani mentions the characteristics of the *qiyāmah* by stating,

> The Resurrection would have the power to bring out the spiritual meaning of all things, even of a religion in which there had been no idea of this exegesis of the Spirit; similarly, it is possible to say that all the *ḥudūd* are gathered together in the inert wood of the Cross. Yes, in this Night of Destiny, whose mystical Light has power to transfigure all things, it is given to the *Qā'im*, the Resurrector" (Sijistani quoted in Corbin, 1957, 101-102).

The idea of *Qā'im*, has symbolic importance in Ismaili literature. Some Ismaili thinkers wished to see a conclusion to their ongoing individual search for meaning and enlightenment and struggle to establish an ideal organization. Thus, according to Ismaili philosophers, this evolution of humanity continues in a cyclical manner, influenced and guided by the divine revelation. These cycles of *satr* and *kashf* alternate each other as the process of regeneration and recreation goes on.

The Essence of *Nubuwwah*

Kirmani agreed with Abu Bakr al-Razi's argument that the human intellect is capable of perceiving benefits and losses. The same intellect gives human beings superiority over animals. It helps a person to rise high and reach their objective and purpose. Through the intellect, one gains skills, learns crafts and understands difficult and hidden matters (1977, 23).

However, Kirmani further argues that though the intellect is capable of performing all these functions, a human does not reach this stage by himself. It is through prophets that we acquire knowledge and grow. The prophets received in their souls the "angelic lights" (*anwār*

al-malakūt), and achieved perfection and their intellects are perfect. Through them, we attain what is beneficial for us in this world and in the hereafter. Through them (Prophets) and their teachings, we rise above the non-rational animal, and through their guidance, we perceive secret matters that are hidden from us. Our intellects are the door by which we receive their blessings (*barakāt*) (1977*,* 25).

Kirmani rejects the notion that ordinary human beings possess perfections and powers that Abu Bakr attributed to the human intellect. Kirmani outlines the process by which people obtain knowledge through the Prophet and his successor, the *Asās*. According to him, "These are the qualities found in the actualized intellects (1977, 27).

Sijistani enumerates three levels of Prophethood and revelation. The first level is the explicit (*bi al-taṣrīḥ*), the revelation of Allah to his servant. This is the stage of the Nāṭiq, the Enunciator Prophets. Hence, the role of the Nāṭiq to convey the exoteric aspect of the Sharī'ah as an inclusive term, consists of commands and ethics and other religious and secular matters whose implications could be understood by all levels of people.

The second level of revelation is from behind the "veil" (*ḥijāb*). This is the stage of the *Asās* (the Foundation). As the successor of a prophet, he receives his share of divine knowledge behind the exoteric Sharī'ah, which is the *ḥijāb*. This interpretation by Sijistani corresponds to the function of the *Asās.* The role of the *Asās* is to transmit the inner meaning of the divine message. The exoteric aspect of Sharī'ah is like the *ḥijāb*, an outer crust which conceals the inner kernel of meaning and wisdom. This outer crust is peeled by the *Asās* and the inner meaning is revealed. All this is possible due to divine assistance (*ta'yīd*). Technically, this does not conflict with the so-called "orthodox" view. The *Asās* is not ascribed with the role of receiving revelation. Rather, he maintains the status of the original revelation received by a

messenger. The *Asās*, in the form of *ta'yīd*, has innate wisdom and insight into the esoteric dimension of the divine message. In this divinely sanctioned role, he is in a position to unfold the inner wisdom of the divine message. This level of the *Asās* corresponds to a spiritual entity, namely *fatḥa*, whose rank is equivalent to the Angel Mika'il in Ismaili cosmology.

The third level is the revelation of Allah to His servants who accepted the messengers. It is through *khayāl* (thought), which passes to the *Mutimm*, "the Perfector." The role of the *Mutimm* is a combination of the above two functions. *Khayāl* is a form of spiritual energy, which is capable of generating new forms and at the same time unfolding inner meaning. *Khayāl* corresponds to the Angel Israfil. It means that since the institution of the *Imāmah* will last long after the Prophet and the *Asās* are physically gone from the world, the need remains for their successors to regenerate and recreate external forms of the customs and traditions of religion in order to perpetuate, sustain, and maintain the relevance of the original message of the Last Prophet.

The dual functions assumed by the Imam win him the title of *al-Mutimm*, "the Completer." It does not give him a higher rank in the hierarchy; he remains at the third rank. The Nāṭiq, in fact, encompasses both the exoteric and esoteric aspects of the divine message but conveys only the external aspect to people; he entrusts the inner aspect to his successor, the *Asās,* who transmits the inner to the initiated few. The *Mutimm* regenerates and recreates new forms from the same Sharī'ah according to the need of the time and the geographical milieu (1966, 60, 149).

Muhammad in Ismaili Prophetology

The image of Muhammad's Prophethood that emerges from classical Ismaili works is that he is one of the seven Nāṭiq of the great cycle. Although all theological concepts linked with his prophecy, such as the finality of his

Prophecy are retained, their interpretation is rendered in relation to the Ismaili understanding of the prophetic message and its cosmic purpose. Hence, the uniqueness of the prophecy of Muhammad, which is emphasized in theological and traditional works, is overwhelmed by his role in the continuity of divine guidance. Muhammad, despite being the last Prophet with the final message, assumes a permanent additional significance by establishing the cycle of *Imāmah*, which is responsible for the esoteric and symbolic interpretation of the divine message.

According to Ismaili Prophetology, each enunciating prophet comprises a cycle (*dawr*) having seven Imams. All these establish a system of da'wah with its hierarchies and functionaries. These functionaries continue to exist until the next Nāṭiq appears. The Nāṭiq is informed and assisted by the dignitaries of the last cycle to establish a new Sharī'ah and law. However, each of these prophets, as pointed out by Qadi Noman, came to continue the true da'wah. He states, "The *da'wah* (call to religion) is always present, there is continuity and all the prophets are linked with it" (Noman, 1960, 317).

Abu Hatim al-Razi's *Kitāb al-Iṣlāḥ* is a description of the system of the da'wah, its philosophical and ideological basis, and its organization, functionaries, and operations. Although the work is wrapped within a theological discourse, it is actually about the operation of the da'wah organization, in which every member is placed according to his 'rank' forming a hierarchical structure.

To *dā'īs,* true religion corresponds to the prophetic mission. The mission is not limited to any particular Prophet but to the institution of Prophecy, which outlives all individual Prophets. Hence, the da'wah represents a reality grander and more splendid than doctrine or dogma could demonstrate or encompass. Canard defines da'wah*:* "In the religious sense, the da'wah is the invitation, addressed to man by Allah and the prophets, to believe in

true religion, Islam (Quran XIV: 46). The religion of all the prophets is Islam and each prophet has his da'wah" (Canard, 1965, 168).

When Abu Hatim painstakingly 'corrects' al-Nasafi's ideas concerning cosmology, or the nature of the mission of the first Nāṭiq, these might be considered as issues of the least importance to many, due to their remoteness in time; for others, these issues might have a theological and philosophical relevance. However, for these Ismaili writers, they were matters of the utmost importance. They would go into detailed discussions and interpretations of the stories of the prophets reported in the Quran and other religious literature in order to make them meaningful and relevant to their interpretation of faith and the system of da'wah, since the salvation of human beings is linked ultimately with the efficient operation of the da'wah.

Thus, the da'wah exists to lead humanity to its spiritual destiny and is responsible for the establishment of an enabling environment to achieve that ultimate goal. Both the spiritual and material aspects of humans are taken care of by the da'wah. A Prophet operates within that paradigm. For Ismailis, the da'wah is a discourse that has a philosophical and mystical framework and an operative mechanism to create such an enabling environment. The Ismaili da'wah has a transcendental reference; it is all encompassing (covering terrestrial and celestial worlds) and it is a sacred organization, existing from the time of the first Nāṭiq until the advent of the *Qā'im*.

Hence, the role of Muhammad can be seen within the paradigm of the da'wah. Just as the bi-dimensional nature of revelation was universally accepted by Ismailis of the period, they also ascribe an esoteric dimension to prophecy by emphasizing *Imāmah* as supplementing Nubuwwah.

For Ismaili writers, every Prophet needs someone to support him and testify to him and his mission. Normally, it is his *ḥujjah* (lit. evidence), who assists him in his mission and who later becomes his successor. It is

commonly understood that a *ḥujjah* is one who stands as an evidence for a prophet or an Imam. It means, he testifies to the truth of Prophecy or *Imāmah* and works in the da‘wah on behalf of the Prophet. In this sense, he appears as the external proof of these institutions; or rather, he helps to establish these proofs. He is a receptacle of the esoteric knowledge entrusted by a prophet. Furthermore, in the eyes of the early Ismaili writers, Muhammad was granted special favors superior to any other prophet due to his status as the last Prophet. Qadi Noman states, "Muhammad is the last messenger for all humanity. Allah made him evidence (*ḥujjah*) for all creation by ending Prophecy (*Nubuwwah*) with him" (1960, 328). In this sense, Muhammad is the *ḥujjah* who presents the evidence to establish *Tawḥīd*.

In the Ismaili tariqah, "Muhammad is the prototype of humanity and corresponds to the Universal Intellect (*al-‘aql al-kull*)" (Ivanow, 1961, 182). This universal and all-encompassing character of the prophecy of Muhammad is unique in that it corresponds to the universal role that Muslims sought to play in world history during the medieval period. The attribution of this universal character to the prophecy of Muhammad may have formed the impetus behind the zeal which led Muslims to engage in globe surfing, art, literature and scientific explorations.

Muhammad: The Last Prophet

An important aspect of Ismaili Prophetology is its emphasis on the finality of the prophecy of Muhammad. For Ismaili writers, the da‘wah is the permanent institution that carries on the light of divine guidance. A Prophet appears to fulfill this function of communicating the divine message. Since the history of prophecy rotates in a cyclical fashion, the cycle of *Imāmah* commenced when the cycle of prophecy ended with Muhammad.

The inauguration of the new cycle renders the cycle of Muhammad doubly significant. It makes the religion

brought by Muhammad perfect and complete because it covers both the exoteric and esoteric aspects. This cycle will culminate with the appearance of the *Qā'im*, who would bring intellectual and spiritual fulfillment to humanity. The former aspect is attained by establishing an enabling social environment that is without injustice and corruption, and the latter, by raising humanity intellectually higher towards ultimate spiritual fulfillment. Describing the prominence of the cycle of Muhammad, Qadi Noman states,

> He (Allah) sent Muhammad with guidance and *al-bayān* (explication) to guide the believers to the Truth and to the religion of the Truth (*dīn al-ḥaqq*). He raised it (the *Sharī'ah*) high to dominate all other religions. Allah manifested it upon all other religions to complete His promise that He will send the *Qā'im* at the end of the age (1960, 344).

All Ismaili writers of the period shared a consensus about the finality of Muhammad's Prophecy and the appearance of the *Qā'im* at the end of his cycle. Abu Hatim, discussing the same issue, states, "There are seven masters of cycles, the first is Adam and the last of whom is the one of whom the Prophet has given news. All the cycles are in potentiality, including ours of Muhammad, except the last one; the cycle which succeeds ours is in actuality" (*Iṣlāḥ*, 59). In another instance, Abu Hatim mentions, "Muhammad is the last among the *Nuṭaqā'* because there is no Nāṭiq after him who will compile the Sharī'ah and his Sharī'ah is attached with the *qiyāmah* (*Iṣlāḥ*, 59).

Thus, the finality of prophecy was interpreted for the benefit of the Ismaili da'wah and its significance enhanced by its link to the chain of Imams who were to follow Muhammad. The Imams play the role of mediators after the demise of the Prophet. Thus, the link between Allah

and humanity continues to exist. Qadi Noman, describing this continuity of mediators, states,

> They are the rope (*ḥabl*) of Allah whose one end is in the hand of Allah and the other is in the hands of His servants. Allah describes the messenger of Allah as one who is the first rank (*awwal ḥadd*) of the rope in the lower physical world (*al-ʻālam al-suflī*), the Asās is linked with him, and the Imams are attached with the Asās, one after the other. The lower end (*al-ṭaraf al-adnā*), which is the Imam of the time, is in the hands of people. Whomsoever in his period holds to it, holds to the rope of Allah. Each one of them in his period is the strong (firm) rope (*al-urwah al-wuthqā*), which is unbroken (1960, 345).

Qadi Noman, like other Ismaili writers, puts forward the thesis that a Nāṭiq brings the Sharīʻah whilst the *Asās* and other succeeding Imams disclose the inner meaning of the divine message. He quotes a famous hadith in which the Prophet said, "I am the city of knowledge and Ali is its door." He explains that the city represents the external dimension, that is, the visible aspect of the divine message, and Ali, as the door leads to the inner and invisible dimension of the divine message. This simply means that access to the inner core of the divine message is possible only through Ali and his successors, the Imams.

Thus, the central role of Muhammad in Ismaili prophecy is that he is the last prophet who perfected the religion by introducing *Imāmah* and opening the process of esoteric teachings to pave the way for the advent of the *Qā'im*. Qadi Noman, states, "Allah distinguished Muhammad with the finality of Prophecy (*Nubuwwah*) and messengership (*al-risālah*), therefore, his Sharīʻah is not abrogated by any one's Sharīʻah, nor his prophecy by anyone's prophecy" (1960, 317).

Sijistani also states: "The cycle of Muhammad is the cycle of the Quran and the end of the great cycle" (1966, 181). With him, the Sharī'ah was completed (1966, 184-5). In this respect, Sijistani is referring to the end of the cycle of prophecy and the completion of the exoteric teachings, as explained earlier.

Chapter 4

Abu Hatim al-Razi on *Nubuwwah*

The Writing of *A'lām al-Nubuwwah*

Kitāb A'lām al-Nubuwwah consists of debates between the two Razis — Abu Bakr and Abu Hatim — covering various philosophical and theological topics. Both were scholars of exceptional caliber. Abu Bakr al-Razi was also an outstanding scientist and physician. The debates take place in the court of the Amir of Rayy and were attended by the Amir, the Chief Judge, and other elites of the society (Sawy & Aavani, 1977). Hossein Nasr, a prominent scholar of Islamic Studies, remarks about the importance of the debates by noting,

> Rather, these [debates] mark the confrontation between two philosophers of vast learning with highly developed skills of rational analysis and criticism, one of them bases himself on the verities of revelation and inner certitude and the other on a form of "rationalism" (1977, n.p.).

The primary debate focuses on the importance and legitimacy of a religion and its leadership. Abu Bakr was

the most prominent and accomplished scientist of his time. He introduced key scientific methods of inquiry and research, such as observation and experimentation. In his perspective, knowledge acquisition occurs through observation and experimentation and religious doctrine does not meet such scientific standards. A religion does not have verifiable source or method of acquiring knowledge. Abu Bakr believed that philosophy is the only way to arrive at the truth.

Abu Hatim argues that not all human beings are equal in intelligence. They are not capable of discovering truth by their own personal efforts. Therefore, they need teachers and guides who are divinely endowed with intelligence and are given special knowledge to help the masses discover the truth. Hence, he presents various signs that affirm that Prophets *do* have exceptional knowledge and dispositions to be leaders among people.

The historical significance of *Kitāb A'lām al-Nubuwwah* lies in its unique format and content. The debate that took place between two outstanding scholars of the time represents a pinnacle in the age-old controversy between revelation and reason, and prophetic and empirical modes of knowledge.

These controversies continued for a long time among scholars such as Ibn Sina and Ibn Tufayl. An important factor to be noted in this work is that Abu Bakr expresses pragmatic and scientific attitudes towards the social and religious realities of the time. On the other hand, Abu Hatim, who was well versed in philosophy, defends religion and prophecy by grounding his arguments in traditional sources of Islamic knowledge. He attempts to demonstrate diverse ways of knowing and the possibility of reconciliation between prophetic and empirical modes of knowledge.

Abu Hatim systematically reports Abu Bakr's arguments and criticism on various issues under appropriate headings or sub-headings; he then responds to

each issue, one at a time. Abu Hatim frequently summarizes his opponent's arguments "to avoid arduous details" (Abu Hatim, 1977, 183). First, he reports Abu Bakr's critique and then reports the debate or his arguments on a particular subject. Abu Hatim appears to be well aware of Abu Bakr's works on religion and prophecy such as *Makhāriq al-Anbiyā'* (Miracles of Prophets) and *Fī Naqd al-Adyān* (A Critique of Religions). He refers to Abu Bakr's criticism on religion in these works. Abu Hatim states, "He debated with me on the issue of prophecy and brought forth the arguments similar to what he had written in his book" (Abu Hatim, 1977, 3). It is likely that Abu Hatim is referring to *Makhāriq al-Anbiyā'*.

L. E. Goodman (1975, 38, fn.1), doubting the sincere transmission of Abu Bakr arguments, states: "In relating Razi's myth, Abu Hatim plainly has suppressed the argument, either for want of sympathy or for want of comprehension." Mentioning Abu Bakr's defensive stand in the debate, he states further, "We hardly blame Razi for the imperfect state in which we find his argument, since its preservation was left by history to the tender mercies of his critics, and it is Razi's opponent, Abu Hatim who presents to our scrutiny only the rhetorical flesh, without the logical bones" (Goodman, 1975, 38, fn.18).

Abu Hatim (1977, 183) admits that he is summarizing his opponent's arguments due to a fear of prolixity. On this basis, Goodman critiques him of suppressing Abu Bakr arguments. Abu Hatim states, "This was the statement by the *mulḥid* (the heretic; referring to Abu Bakr al-Razi) and I have omitted a lot from that. I left it to avoid prolixity and I have mentioned only points from him." A comparison with Abu Bakr's scattered surviving statements in various sources shows that Abu Hatim did not misreport. Since, it was Abu Hatim who was reporting the debate, he had the advantage of being in a position to select from Abu Bakr's criticism.

It also appears that Abu Hatim deeply resented Abu Bakr al-Razi. In the entire book, he never mentions the name of the person with whom he was debating. Instead, he refers to Abu Bakr as the *mulhid* (heretic). It is Kirmani who identifies Abu Bakr by name (Kirmani, 1977, 9). This shows the low opinion Abu Hatim had of his opponent. In the absence of the original works, it is difficult to ascertain the exact nature and content of Abu Bakr's criticism on religion (al-Biruni, 1936 & 1958; Nasir Khusraw, 1953; Kraus & Pines, 1934). However, one cannot undermine the intertextual value of such debates for posterity. Through this debate, we are not just able to perceive Abu Hatim's viewpoint but are also clued in on the various issues that Abu Bakr raises. That Abu Hatim himself explains both viewpoints and the degree and method of his reporting gives it a level of credibility and added value.

We have other indications regarding Abu Bakr's severe criticism on religion and prophecy. Al-Biruni's classification of his two works under the category of *kufriyāt* (Infidelities) are indicative of his anti-dogmatic and anti-religious attitude. They may also reflect al-Biruni's feelings and the general sentiments regarding the works among medieval writers. Arberry states, "Even the illustrious Abu Rayhan al-Biruni, the historian of India and broad-minded investigator of Indian philosophy and religion, added his voice to the general chorus of disapproval... he roundly condemned him for dabbling in free thought, and even spoke of his blindness as a Divine retribution" (Arberry, 1950, 8-9). One might attribute the neglect of Abu Bakr's works on religion and philosophy to the popular and academic disapproval of his ideas. His works were gradually abandoned and became scarce, except in small groups or among certain radical sects (Kraus & Pines, 1934, 1136). Abu Hatim's reports give us insight into Abu Bakr's views that would have otherwise been left undiscovered.

Based on Abu Hatim's reports, Abu Bakr's position on Prophethood and religion was radically different from other rationalist, peripatetic philosophers, such as Abu Yusuf Ya'qub al-Kindi (ca 873 CE), Abu Nasr Muhammad al-Farabi (ca 950-51 CE), and Abu Ali Husayn Ibn Abdullah Ibn Sina (1037 C.E). These philosophers never denied the role or importance of the revelation. There were debates about the significance of each form of knowledge. Philosophers such as Ibn Rushd and Ibn Tufayl attempted to reconcile the two. Michael E. Marmura states,

> ...the *falasifah* were "Islamic" in that they regarded themselves as Muslims, claiming that their conception of God and the world was consistent with the Quranic view. Most of them attempted to demonstrate the harmony between their respective philosophies and Islamic revelation, and whether such attempts proved convincing or not, they represent a characteristic feature of *falsafah* (1986, 5:267).

Abu Hatim on Religion and Philosophy

The debate between Abu Hatim and Abu Bakr focused on the concept of prophecy. Both Razis also discuss the major philosophical issues of the time. In fact, Abu Hatim al-Razi directs his counter-attack against Abu Bakr's philosophical position by applying prevalent concepts of 'the five eternals', which include the notions of time and space. Abu Bakr is highly critical of dogmatism and the institutionalization of religion, which he considered led people to blindly follow beliefs with no room for creative, critical thinking, and free inquiry (Abu Hatim, 1977). Abu Bakr's critique of religion is three-fold based on:

1. The method of attaining religious knowledge;

2. The lack of consistency and empirical validity of religious knowledge;
3. The role of religion in society in justifying social inequalities, discouraging people to search for knowledge, and encouraging *taqlīd* (imitation) of elites.

Questioning the legitimacy of prophecy and religion as the locus of 'power' in a society, Abu Bakr al-Razi notes,

> The people of *Sharī'ah* take the religion (*al-dīn*) from their leaders (*al-ra'ūsā'*) through imitation (*taqlīd*). They reject inquiry (*naẓar*) and research (*baḥth*) concerning the fundamentals (*al-uṣūl*), [if questioned they] become vehement, and forbid it. They transmit reports from their leaders, which makes the abstention from inquiry in religion incumbent upon them. They accuse those who disagree with the transmitted report of heresy (Abu Hatim, 1977, 31).

Abu Bakr's critique of religion is based on classism in society. He argues that elites in society define religion for the masses and people follow them without examining such matters of faith. Further, the elites in society strongly discourage their followers to inquire or research into the fundamental beliefs of religion. Abu Bakr explains the knowledge and power discourse in society that defines the relationship between religion and society or individuals. 'Power' defines legitimate forms of knowledge and imposes a particular notion of truth in society (cf. Foucault, 1980). Abu Bakr candidly points out that the masses follow their leaders without critically examining the validity of their statements or the truth of their creed or beliefs.

Abu Bakr was aware of the challenges in the society of his time where there were debates among scholars on various topics, but scholars, like him, who pushed the

limits of the dominant discourse and challenged the established dogma or fundamental religious tenets, experienced hostility and persecution. He further argues that traditions and doctrines define the parameters of human behavior and thinking, and religious elites label those who transgress such boundaries as heretics and severely punish them. For him, freedom of thought could not be part of any religious community because its beliefs would not hold up to rational and scientific arguments and evidences. For Abu Bakr, religion is a means of social control that is part of the socio-political structure in society. In his view, religion causes 'upheavals' and 'disruptions' in society and conflicts among various groups separated by their distinct identities.

Religion is an important aspect of individual and community identities. People invest a great deal of historical, psychological, and cultural capital in such identities; therefore, communities fight to preserve their cultural capital and identities. For most religious communities, religious identities connect them with an absolute and permanent reality. However, a consequence of the belief in the absolute is that it does not allow questioning and room for other 'truth claims' (from other groups) to co-exist. Other discourses of truth either exist at the margins of the society or are annihilated. In other words, the dominant group looks down upon other groups, considers them as gone astray, or doomed to hell. In a worst-case scenario, feeling the heat of the competition, a group may aggressively assert its dominance by imposing its notion of truth, and eliminate competing groups.

Abu Bakr criticizes the fundamental concepts of God and *Nubuwwah*. In criticizing the basis of religious belief, Abu Bakr asks Abu Hatim,

> Why is it necessary that God should favor one nation with prophecy over another making Prophets guides and putting humanity in need of them? In addition, how do you justify,

> according to the wisdom of the Wise, that He should choose that for them, inciting among them enmities, assuring hostilities and increasing wars, and thereby destroying people (1977, 10).

Abu Bakr was conscious of social justice issues. Hence, he raises the question as to why God would choose to send a Prophet to a particular nation but not to other nations. He wants to examine the reasons behind the selection of one nation over the other for such a privilege. Alternatively, why would God not give knowledge to all human beings so there is no need to send a prophet or create organized religions? He considers the diversity of religions as the major cause for conflicts among people. Abu Bakr uses irony when he says “wisdom of the wise” whose supposed actions lead to upheavals and violence.

Abu Bakr perceives the political function of a prophetic mission. He finds that Prophets were involved in the political struggle of the society. For him, a Prophet is one who represents a 'power' group. By virtue of his 'prophetic status' and a special kind of knowledge, a Prophet possesses ‘power’, which legitimizes his control over the masses. He asserts that religious knowledge is unsound because it is not discovered through examination and observation like scientific or philosophical knowledge.

Abu Hatim, on the other hand, views the prophet as a person who plays an important role in the transformation of a society. By virtue of his knowledge and spiritual status, he is in a position to exert influence to bring about social change and realize moral ideals in individuals and in societies. Thus, his wisdom makes him the center of power and the catalyst for change in a society. He brings justice and human virtues into practice. He is a role model and his teachings direct people to a higher purpose. He aims at the transformation of the moral and spiritual bases of human life. He also provides meaning and purpose in human life and a historical and evolutionary continuity, where

societies evolve towards greater perfection. Prophets are a unique category of leaders who base their legitimacy on metaphysical truths and provide a link between the mundane and the spiritual.

Abu Bakr's questions suggest that those who make a claim to receive religious knowledge, i.e., revelation, do not have any sound empirical basis for it to be considered as a valid form of knowledge, since it has not been reached through investigation and rational inquiry but is merely considered as 'given.' Further, since it lacks empirical grounding, it permits self-contradiction and easily embraces commonly accepted superstitions and stories, which means that such knowledge lacks 'the truth.'

Abu Bakr denies the validity of any form of knowledge that is not verifiable through rational criteria. He argues that sound knowledge is self-consistent and scientifically investigated. He considers philosophy as the only valid form of knowledge since it is the result of rational inquiry and it represents the 'truth' when expressed in systematic and logical language. Hence, the prophetic message, which is comprised of symbols, anecdotes, and allegories, lacks the 'truth.'

Abu Hatim (1977, 13) asks him, "What do you say about those who reason concerning philosophy while believing in the laws of the prophets? Do their souls become transparent and can they expect to be released from the impurities of this world?" Abu Bakr responds to Abu Hatim (1977, 13) by asking, "How can someone inquiring into philosophy also believe in absurdities (*kharāfāt*), contradictions, and insist on ignorance and imitation (*taqlīd*)?" Based on the above dialogue, Abu Bakr excludes the possibility of any reconciliation between these two modes of knowledge. Abu Bakr squarely condemns religion as nonsense and fictitious.

In contrast to Abu Bakr's views, Muslim philosophers generally believed that co-existence between religion and philosophy was possible. Philosophers asserted the

relevance of religion in a society. Ibn al-Tufayl (d. 1185) in his philosophical story, *Ḥayy ibn Yaqẓān*, indicates this controversy between prophetic and philosophical modes of knowledge. The hero of the narrative, *Ḥayy ibn Yaqẓān* grows up on an island alone and through observations, experimentation and contemplation, achieves the highest form of knowledge (Hasanali, 1996). However, when he visits another island inhabited by people who followed a religion and the Sharī'ah, he tries to convey to them what he himself had discovered in terms of metaphysical 'truths.' He soon realizes that people have no inclination or urge to discover the Truth. He also finds that there is a hierarchy in society in which people are placed according to their knowledge and intelligence.

Ibn Tufayl points out human wickedness and finds that people engaged in fulfilling their mundane desires, do not heed good advice, or practise it, nor do they traverse on the path of wisdom. For the majority of people, the Sharī'ah is beneficial and necessary in this world. Ḥayy discovers the wisdom behind the message of the Prophets (Ibn Tufayl, 1968, 95-7). These philosophers attempted to reconcile the difference that existed between philosophical and prophetic knowledge.

By contrast, Abu Bakr does not accept religion as a form of knowledge, since to him, it appears to consist merely of superstitions, fairy tales, and imitation (*taqlīd*). For him, philosophy, on the other hand, is based on the personal zeal to investigate and discover the truth (Abu Hatim, 1977, 12). However, Ibn Tufayl reconciles the differences by concluding that though philosophers and prophets attain the same truth, they attain it by different means, i.e., reason and revelation, respectively. The use of language is different in religion and philosophy. Asāl, in Ibn Tufayl's narrative, fails to communicate with Ḥayy. Only when he teaches Ḥayy his language, could they communicate with each other, indicating the need for a

common language between two modes of knowledge (Hasanali, 1996).

Clifford Geertz (1973) explains this phenomenon by stating that the cultural web of meanings gives a person an understanding of the environment in which s/he lives and acts. These shared meanings therefore, make culture public or provide a social context. Since these meanings are culturally specific, it is difficult for an outsider to decipher them. Geertz (1973) argues that the outsider's lack of familiarity with the imaginative universe of 'others' makes it difficult for a person from a different cultural context to draw meaning from it. This indicates the need for having a common vocabulary to communicate intellectual and spiritual experiences, especially when two people come from different backgrounds.

Even though *Ḥayy ibn Yaqẓān* is a work of fiction, it addresses the primary issue of the conflict between reason and revelation. It appears that Ibn Tufayl was aware of those contentions among various intellectual disciplines, such as between philosophers and theologians and between Sufis and theologians or jurists; he establishes the legitimacy of difference that can allow an access to the understanding of other disciplines.

The debate between Abu Hatim and Abu Bakr remains a dispute and not a dialogue. No attempt is made by either side to define their terms of reference, or to create a common communicative vocabulary in order to access a more profound understanding of the opponent's viewpoint. Both opponents remain discordant at two ends of a continuum. When Ḥayy, the main character of the above mentioned philosophical narrative, encounters Asāl, a man from another island, he discovers that the prophetic message was similar to the truth he had discovered through philosophical and scientific methods. He testifies that prophets were faithful in the transmission of the truth and Ḥayy professes the *shahādah* (Ibn Tufayl, 1968, 93).

Marmura (1968, xii) points out, "Avicenna follows Al-Farabi in holding that prophetic revelation does not contradict demonstrative philosophical truth. It is the same truth expressed in the language of imagery and symbols, which the non-philosophers can understand."

This view sharply contrasts with Abu Bakr's views on prophecy and shows the philosophers' attempted to bridge differences between two modes of knowledge. Abu Bakr's attitude, in this regard, is another extreme. For him, the question of reconciliation does not arise simply because religion does not represent true and sound knowledge. Further, he sees that religion represents the class interest of elites and is a mechanism of social control. It implies that it is a mere political construct for the social management of 'difference' (or deviance) in society.

Abu Hatim finds flaws in Abu Bakr's arguments. Abu Hatim argues that Abu Bakr's statement implies that God knew the evil consequences of creating the world. Even then, he helped the soul to create the world. God could have avoided the ordeal of the soul caused by the creation of the world, either by using His power and preventing her from doing so or by letting her know the evil consequences. Was He lacking power to prevent her, or mercy to give her prior knowledge? Abu Bakr gives the analogy of a boy who insists on entering a garden; his father who knows that there are thorns and insects there, still allows him to go in so that he may have a direct experience of the evil itself (Abu Hatim, 1977, 22-3).

Abu Hatim argues that God, using either His power or His mercy, could save the soul from prolonged sufferings. He further argues that the analogy of the garden and the boy presupposes the existence of the garden concurrent with the boy. The boy gazed at the garden, which provoked his passions to enter it. This implies that the world is co-eternal with the soul. If the world were not co-eternal with the soul, then how did she know the description of the world, which provoked the yearning in

her to take form in the world? How is it possible that she knew such a description of the world but not the evil consequences of assuming a form in it? This also implies a prior knowledge in the soul. If it is accepted that the world is not co-eternal with the soul and was created and then the soul gazed at it, then it contradicts the statement that the soul was the cause of the creation of the world (1977, 24).

In the analogy, it is stated that there was a yearning, which activated the soul to assume form in the world. Abu Hatim al-Razi's argument is that if this motion is spontaneous, then both the motion and yearning would be co-eternal with the soul. This would make seven eternals. It also makes the terrestrial world eternal since its creation would also be spontaneous, because it is intrinsically linked with the cause. If the motion is through compulsion (*qasrīyah*), there must be someone or something, which compelled her. This can only be the Creator unless the act is attributed to prime matter, time, or space, which is impossible. If it is the Creator, then the previous argument that the soul was activated by its own yearning would be wrong (1977, 24). In other words, Abu Hatim's arguments draw from the philosophies of the time to reflect a logical and rational basis for belief in the Creator.

Abu Hatim's Defense of Religion

Abu Bakr's major criticism, based on the debate, is directed against the control that religious discourses exercise over human freedoms and choices, and their demand for conformity and uniformity in social behavior and thinking. He feels that such control and management of human behaviors and activities leave little room for freethinking and free inquiry. He refutes the notion that the philosophical traditions require conformity and adherence to conventions of a particular school, philosopher, or viewpoint. Abu Hatim, however, points out that similar correlation exist in philosophical traditions, where the

teacher-pupil relation is more or less like the relation between a Prophet and his follower.

Religions may claim to be all-encompassing divine knowledge and a fundamental denominator, yet, Abu Bakr points out their restrictive and limiting characteristics. He notes that religions do not allow freedoms. Unlike philosophy, religions define human roles and limitations; they prescribe acceptable behaviors and codes of conduct. He considers religions to be based on assumptions and these assumptions do not stand up to rational critique.

Abu Bakr's major criticism against religion was that the advocates of the Sharī'ah follow the religion presented by their leaders by imitation (*taqlīd*). Religious traditions reported from their leaders make it incumbent upon the followers to forsake research and the critical examination of religious principles. If a person examines his or her belief, s/he is often accused of *kufr* (infidelity) and is persecuted (Abu Hatim, 1977, 31). For that reason, "The Truth is most deeply buried and concealed" (1977, 32). Further, he argues, "Only the weakest men, women, and children gather around these leaders because of the whiteness of their clothing and after a long time, these (religious convictions) become their nature and habits" (1977, 32).

It appears that Abu Bakr speaks from personal experiences in reaction to limitations that may have been imposed upon him. These critiques are also indicative that Abu Hatim did faithfully present Abu Bakr's perspective. The debate is an early analysis of the increasingly central role that Traditions begin to play in the establishment of norms, dogmas, and laws.

Abu Hatim replies by briefly discussing the principle of *taqlīd*. He points to the existence of *taqlīd* among philosophers. Then, he proceeds to explain, "The people of Truth and Justice (*Ahl al-ḥaqq wa al-'adl*) do not allow *taqlīd* regarding principles (*uṣūl*), such as the knowledge of *Tawḥīd*, concerning *Nubuwwah* or the affirmation of

Imāmah. These principles of faith must not be accepted by mere *taqlīd*. However "when *Tawḥīd* is proven (*thabata*), Prophecy explicated (*waṣaḥa*) and *Imāmah* verified (*thabata*), after that comes the *taqlīd* of the truthful, the just and knowledgeable leader (*al-imām al-ḥaqq al-'ādil al- 'ālim*)" (Abu Hatim, 1977, 33). This citation may be the only place where an explicit reference to Ismaili terminology may be found in this work.

According to Abu Hatim's argument, human beings do not have an innate capacity to reach the end of 'knowledge,' because there always is a more knowledgeable person. *Taqlīd* is imperative after the attainment of the knowledge of these fundamentals. Abu Hatim argues that faith in *Tawḥīd*, *Nubuwwah*, and *Imāmah* must be rational. A person must use her/his reasoning to arrive at the truth of these ideas. Once a person has succeeded in verifying these fundamental concepts, then the person should follow the guidance from Allah, the Prophet, and the Imam of the time completely. In other words, *taqlīd* is only required after the acceptance of *Nubuwwah* and *Imāmah*. Further, *only* the *taqlīd* of the Imam and the Prophet is required, and not that of any other person.

Abu Hatim refutes two points that Abu Bakr makes concerning the human capacity to acquire knowledge and attain the highest Truth. He states that every person has a different capacity to acquire knowledge and there is a need to have a teacher in order to realize this potentiality. However, he admits that human reason by itself is capable of achieving knowledge of the fundamentals of faith. Hence, he agrees with philosophers that the rational faculty is capable of perceiving the existence of the Creator. He also indicates that the human intellect is capable of realizing the need to have divinely guided teachers who can lead it to the ultimate goal of a human being's intellectual and spiritual search and inquiry.

Abu Hatim emphasizes that the search for the ultimate object of knowledge is more feasible with the assistance of divinely guided teachers, since it is their task to make this search easier for people. Here, in Abu Hatim's argument, are the early seeds of the *tā'līm* doctrine, which Hasan Sabah (d.518/1124) later developed. Hasan argued,

> For absolute truth, such as religion seemed to require, a decisive authority (an Imam) is needed, for otherwise one man's reasoned opinion is as good as another's and none is better than a guess; that this proposition itself is in fact all that reason as such can furnish us with; finally then, that, as no reasoned proof could demonstrate who the Imam was (only that he was needed), the Imam must be he who relied on no positive, external proof of his own position, but only on pointing out explicitly the logically essential but usually only implicit need (Hodgson, 1974, 185).

Replying to Abu Bakr's criticism on the prohibition of debate and examination in religion, Abu Hatim states "...neither the *ahl al-Sharī'ah* reject nor does the Sharī'ah make it incumbent to forsake debate and examination. Only a group of weak people will reject it because the benefit which is in it is hidden from them" (Abu Hatim, 1977, 35). According to Abu Hatim, the rejection of exploration and research in religion is limited to a small group of people. Not every religious community uniformly or universally accepts or applies the principle of *taqlīd*. However, he does acknowledge that there were people who prohibited research or discussion.

Abu Hatim argues that *taqlīd* cannot be held against religion, since the Quran invites believers to examine and discuss matters of faith with Muslims and non-Muslims. It instructs a person to debate and listen to an opponents' viewpoint and follow that which is the best (*aḥsān*), the

foremost (*'ūlā*), the truest (*aḥaqq*), and the obligatory (*awjaba*). The Quran calls upon believers to follow the principles of common good, best practice, and greater value for society. People are encouraged to follow that which is a priority and the truest among options.

Abu Hatim points out that the Quran permits, in fact encourages, debate and examination. However, Abu Bakr was also right when he noted the suppression of discussion and free inquiry in matters of faith. There is a political dimension to this issue of suppression. In Islamic history, there have been instances to which we have referred earlier when political opponents were persecuted for their beliefs. For example, persecutions of the Shia under the Umayyads and Abbasids, as well as the later victimization of Ismailis, are historical facts.

It appears from Abu Hatim al-Razi's report that Abu Bakr refers to Quranic *āyāt* and the *aḥādīth* (traditions) of the Prophet Muhammad to prove his point. Abu Hatim, in turn, attempts to interpret the *āyāt* and *aḥādīth*, to reflect alternative meanings. While interpreting the Quranic *āyāt*, he uses linguistic analyses and traditions, and when discussing hadith, he refers to the Quran to explain their meaning. For example, he refers to Surah XVI:125, which says, "Call unto the way of thy Lord with wisdom and fair exhortation and reason with them in the better way." Abu Hatim states that God ordered Muhammad to invite people to Islam through discussion, good manners, and wisdom. He adds that God asked Muhammad to discuss the scriptures and the Quran with Jews and Christians.

According to Abu Hatim's interpretation, Allah commands people to debate with and listen to the opponent's viewpoint. He also commands Muhammad to follow that which is the best and true. Abu Hatim insists that it is exactly the way of "the people of knowledge (*ahl al-ma'arifah*) and people of discernment (*dhū al-albāb*) from amongst the people of Sharī'ah" (Abu Hatim, 1977, 36).

Abu Hatim addresses the tradition probably quoted in one of Abu Bakr books, which says, "In religion, debate (*al-jadal*) and bitterness (*al-mira'*) is *kufr*" (1977, 36) Abu Hatim argues that it is true but notes that *al-jadal* does not mean *al-naẓar*, (examination), but instead in this tradition, it refers to quarrel (*khaṣūmah*) and controversy (*al-tanāzu'*) which are not permitted in religion (1977, 36). The Quran instructs Muslims to approach the *ahl al-Kitāb* (lit. the people of the book, refers to Jews and Christians) with good manners (*aḥsān*), good advice (*al-mu'iẓah al-ḥasanah*), and wisdom (*al-ḥikmah*), since repudiation is not permitted in religion (Quran: III: 64-80 & 98-99).

Discussing the tradition, which says, "do not speculate about Allah but speculate upon His creation" (Abu Hatim, 1977, 38), Abu Hatim reflects that this tradition does not discourage inquiry as such but it prohibits inquiry into the *nature* of the Creator. Abu Hatim sees the wisdom behind this statement that the essence of God is beyond human comprehension. Accordingly, human beings lack the capacity to reach this ultimate goal. Since human faculties lack the potentiality to attain knowledge of the Godhead, inquiry in this matter is not encouraged. For this reason, "We are commanded to inquire into the nature of creation" (Abu Hatim, 1977, 38). Through contemplation on creation, we can know about the His divinity (*ilāhiyātihī*), His Lordship (*rabūbiyatihī*), and His Unity of Being (*Tawḥīdihī*).

Abu Hatim suggests the inductive method by which the existence of the universal can be inferred through the contemplation on particulars. He argues that Allah's artistry, as manifested in creation, is the best evidence for His existence and attributes. In other words, it is impossible to achieve knowledge of the godhead through rational faculties. In this sense, he is anticipating the concept of 'God beyond Being' that was later fully developed in Kirmani's *Rāḥat al-'Aql*.

Abu Hatim quotes *āyāt* that emphasize contemplation over creation (Quran, II, 164; and III, 190). According to him, these mysteries within creation point towards His "essence" (*innīyatihī*) and His Unity (*waḥdāniyatihī*) (Abu Hatim, 1977, 38). The Godhead transcends all rational faculties and limits of speculation and imagination. Those who attempt to speculate about this matter fall into perplexity and their intellects are mystified. No human faculty can encompass God, the Exalted. If that were possible, the created would be more exalted than the Creator (Abu Hatim, 1977, 39).

Abu Bakr retorts that the proponents of Sharī'ah abuse, get angry and shed the blood of those who ask for evidence (*dalīl*) about their beliefs. Hence, the truth remains deeply buried and concealed. Abu Hatim replies to this generalization by stressing the diversity within the Muslim community. He points out that behind the façade of a singular structure and norm, a nation is composed of different kinds of people. People are not perfect and they are not equal in intelligence, understanding, knowledge, and politeness. Similarly, advocates of the Sharī'ah have different temperaments and various elements in their natural disposition. Among them, there are perfect and imperfect, learned and ignorant, silly and humble, and intelligent (*'āqil*) and stupid (*aḥimaq*) people. In fact, people of intelligence (*'āqil*), knowledge (*'ilm*), and humility (*ḥilm*) are few in each Sharī'ah (religious path for a community) (Abu Hatim, 1977, 55-6). In other words, different people react to criticism differently and some may react aggressively, which does not mean that they represent the entire community.

Abu Hatim maintains that the gradations (*ṭabaqāt*) in a religious community are inevitable and the Sharī'ah addresses the needs of all people. His position is the exact opposite to that of Abu Bakr al-Razi, who regards all human beings as having the same potentiality. It is only

the lack of the required inclination and effort that hinders them from actualizing their potential (1977, 4-5).

Abu Hatim states that all people are accepted in religion according to their levels of understanding and virtues, and they are educated into what is necessary for them to know in matters of religion (1977, 56). It implies that the purpose of religion is to educate people in morals and inform them about the will of God. Most people lack the highest moral standards, but that cannot be considered as an argument to condemn religion.

Regarding Abu Bakr's objection that the truth is deeply buried and concealed, Abu Hatim points out an important dimension of the prophetic message. He states that there is a 'power' in the words (*kalām*) of the prophets, which captivates (*jadhabah*) the hearts of the elite and the ordinary, the learned and the layman. Many of those who accepted the words and the revealed books (*al-kutub al-munzalah*) did not know what was in them, but that power captured their souls together by its love (Abu Hatim, 1977, 60-1).

Abu Hatim advances an argument that relates to the effect of religious message on an individual. He attempts to visualize religious experience in isolation from any structural and cultural frame of reference, without situating it in a comparative condition with other socio-cultural components of a society. He also alludes to the function of religion as a mechanism to provide psychological and emotional support to individuals and groups and an agency to transform a person.

Abu Bakr analyzes the religious community as composed of the "weakest men, women and children gathered around the elites (*rūsā'*) of the nation (*millah*)" (Abu Hatim, 1977, 62). These people, according to Abu Bakr, could not be free from the contaminants of the world unless they study philosophy. He insists that all human beings have the same intellectual potential. If they make serious efforts to advance in philosophy, they could free

themselves from the corrupt world and become purified. For him, philosophy is a noble vocation that helps a person achieves higher goals, towards which the soul should strive. He argues that all human beings can achieve higher intellectual and philosophical goals, since we find people engaged in matters of economics and business and all these require intelligence and courage (Abu Hatim, 1977, 5). If they apply the same diligence and intelligence to philosophy, they can achieve something similar to what he himself has attained.

Responding to Abu Bakr, Abu Hatim emphasizes the principle of diversity as an essential construct of a society and points out that a hierarchy exists in all human societies with people of different intelligence, professions, and interests. Further, there are differences within a group of people of more or less skill, knowledge, and so on. He notes that Abu Bakr's statement itself implies a hierarchy in human society when he points out the existence of "weak" adults, women, and children who accept religion. Abu Hatim argues that it would mean that God committed injustice to the people of these categories by giving them weak intelligences; they are hence, unable to attain the truth by way of philosophical inquiry. It suggests that God has deprived them of the opportunity to free themselves from the pollutants of the world. He further argues,

> We have found masses in the countries which we have seen, and groups of people in other countries and islands who have different traditions, but who do not know what philosophy is, neither do they know its nature and truth, let alone inquiring (*naẓar*) within it, except few, whose number can be counted from among the people of Arabic language or Greeks (1977, 63).

Abu Hatim argues that even within the nations, such as Greeks and Arabs, who developed philosophical traditions, supposedly a few have the inclination towards philosophy.

However, since God is Wise, He inspires people with what they need in the matters of religion and the world. He opts the easy way for them. God burdens them only with the obedience of prophecy because it is relatively easy for them. Abu Hatim states,

> *Ahl al-Sharīʻah* say that all creatures are subjugated, commissioned, prohibited, and permitted for their deeds according to their intentions and efforts. People are not accountable for what they are incapable and they are not burdened with such responsibilities (1977, 64).

The Quranic verses IV: 98-9 to which Abu Hatim refers says, "Except the feeble among men, women, and the children, who are unable to devise a plan and are not shown a way. As for such, it may be that Allah will pardon them. Allah is ever clement, forgiving." According to Abu Hatim, this verse shows that religion accommodates everyone and creates convenience for people. Further, explaining the Quranic verses, Abu Hatim states that those who do not have the capacity for the intellectual quest are not subjected to it. Those who have strong intellects are entrusted with such a responsibility. If they are negligent in their responsibility, they are punished, and if they struggle hard, they are rewarded. When they fall short, Allah forgives them.

In religion, the *taqlīd* of authoritative leaders (Prophets and Imams) is considered meaningful and permissible since they are inclined to practice virtues and they try to avoid injustice and disorder due to the fear of punishment. Thus, they become a source of guidance for the weak. For the weak, who do not have recourse (*ḥīlā*) and who cannot guide themselves on the path (*sabīl*), Prophets become mediators and are responsible for their salvation (*barīyah*). God has made religion and the attainment of the virtues easier for them through prophets; hence, religion and the

role of a Prophet become meaningful and significant in society. In other words, the divine message and Prophets as divine instruments establish a just and moral social order; they provide necessary guidance to individuals so that disorder and injustice can be prevented and the rights of individuals and groups are protected.

Abu Hatim attempts to establish a socio-political role for religion by emphasizing its contribution in the establishment of social order, justice, and moral principles. In this process of argument, he never misses a chance to point out contradictions and fallacies in philosophical doctrines. He applies the Quran as the basis of his argument. In this regard, his method is similar to that of the theologians (*mutakallimīn*). Marmura distinguishes between philosophy and theology by stating,

> For proper understanding of *falsafah*, it must be distinguished from *kalām*, Islamic speculative theology. Both disciplines used reason in formulating their respective conceptions of God and his creation, but they differed in approach and motivation. The starting point of *kalām* was revelation. Reason was used in defending the revealed word and in interpreting the natural order in conformity with a Quranic view of creation. With *falsafah*, the starting point was reason, the motivation, and the quest after "the nature of things" (Marmura, 1968, 267).

Furthering his arguments on the rational basis of religion and its function in society, Abu Bakr raises the question as to why a person is elevated to the status of a Prophet and what makes him qualified to lead people.

Abu Hatim addressed Abu Bakr's questions. Later, his younger contemporaries, Sijistani and Kirmani, also discuss the same issues. While the line of argument taken by these Ismaili thinkers was similar, there were differences of emphasis, sometimes in method and also in

certain details, which were inevitable due to the different orientations of these *dā'īs*.

Most of these *dā'īs* relied on what we would term the 'principle of difference' (*tafāwut*). They all perceived a hierarchical structure in the Cosmos as well as in the sociopolitical organizations of society. This hierarchy, for Ismaili thinkers, exists because each individual and society has diverse characteristics. For instance, a hierarchy exists in human society in which individuals are placed according to their qualities, such as piety, knowledge, strength, etc. These differences justify the hierarchy within human society and a relationship, which allows functional inequality. Abu Hatim states,

> In this world, I only see (the relationship of) leader (imām) and follower (*ma'mūm*), learned and learner, in all the nations (*al-milal*), religions (*al-adyān*), in the epistles written by *ahl al-Sharā'i'* and the people of philosophy (*aṣḥāb al-falsafah*). I do not see that people have become self-sufficient of each other; they need each other, they need the '*ulamā'* to learn from and need the *a'immah* (sing. *imām*) to lead them (1977, 4).

Abu Hatim highlights the interdependent relations among various classes and individuals within a society. The thrust of Abu Hatim's argument is that it is practically impossible for all human beings to be the same. Interdependent relationships are bound by structural and normative necessities. Diversity among human beings is not only intellectual but also differential in talent, abilities, and temperament.

> It is God's wisdom and mercy that He chose a group of people from his creation and made them messengers for the rest of humanity, assisted them and distinguished them with prophecy. He gave them knowledge through

> revelation, which was beyond the capacity of a person to know. Prophets, therefore, taught people and guided them to the betterment of their religious and worldly affairs (1977*,* 8).

After establishing the hierarchical structure of human society, Abu Hatim forwards the thesis that it was quite justified and logical for God to select some people to guide others. He categorically mentions that the quality that distinguishes Prophets is divine and is not given to all human beings. Their necessity is proven through their role in fulfilling the profound spiritual and sociopolitical needs of human beings which otherwise would have not been fulfilled.

Abu Hatim in Defense of *Nubuwwah*

Pursuing his argument about hierarchy, Abu Hatim notes that even though the same interdependent relationship of teacher and student does exist in philosophical discipline, the truth is that philosophy is a specialized field. Most people do not have either the inclination or the intellectual capacity to engage in philosophy. Allah would be unjust if He had made human salvation conditional upon something that remains inaccessible to most human beings.

> It is not the customs of *Sharīʻah* to accept only the perfect, the intelligent, the devout and the people with perfect understanding and to exclude those who are short of these status (*marṭab*; pl. *marāṭib*)….; however, in religion, people are accepted according to their status and taught what they need (to know) in the matters of religion. They are told about commands (*amr*) and prohibitions (*nahī*), and then their accountability is on Allah. He rewards each person according to his practice of *al-amr wa al-nahī* and his struggle towards the life hereafter (1977, 56).

Abu Hatim further argues that religion is based on *ḥikmah*.[1] Abu Hatim, like Ibn Sina, thinks that *ḥikmah* has dual theoretical and practical aspects. For Abu Hatim, knowledge is acquired and acted upon; this combination of the two leads to the attainment of *ḥikmah,* i.e., higher spiritual knowledge. "The *kalām* of Prophets consists of wisdom; wisdom is the combination of knowledge and practice. One, who has knowledge and practises it, is wise" (Abu Hatim, 1977, 113). In some instances, *ḥikmah* translates into 'common sense' (1977*,* 65) which necessitates the simplification of things. The prophets are intermediaries between Allah and Creation. Their role is to make matters easier and simpler for people (1977, 65). The role of the Prophet is to transmit the divine commandments to human beings. This tradition continued from one Prophet to another (1977*,* 56).

Contradictions in the Messages of Prophets

Abu Bakr's responses indicate that various prophets contradicted each other about the status and position they held. He notes that if they were 'true' prophets, there should be uniformity and coherence in their teaching rather than the contradictions in their claims. For instance, he argues that Jesus claimed to be the son of Allah (*Ibn*

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[1] *Ḥikmah* has been defined as "wisdom, but also as science and philosophy." It implies "knowledge of higher spiritual truths" (Goichon, 1971, 3; 377). Sometimes it is meant to encompass all forms of knowledge. Corbin defined it as wisdom in the original etymological sense and meaning of the Greek word, *sophia* (1953, 53). Ibn Sina considered it to be constituted of theoretical and practical aspects (Goichon, 1971). It meant that knowledge that is acquired and acted upon comprises wisdom. Corbin considered gnostic knowledge to be an important part of it. He considered theosophy (*ḥikmat Ilāhī*) which represents higher spiritual knowledge is the core definition of the term (1953, 53). It appears that Ismaili thinkers were not very different in defining *ḥikmah*. They also shared a shadow of ambiguity along with the philosophers in defining the term. Sometimes, philosophy and science were considered to be part of *ḥikmah;* sometimes it was applied to the divine message as containing *ḥikmah* in order to indicate the esoteric meaning of the revelation.

Allah), Moses proclaimed that God does not have any son, and Muhammad maintained that He created him like any other human being (Abu Hatim, 1977, 69). According to the debate, Abu Bakr considered that if all of the above were Prophets, then they would not make radically different statements about their status such as being the son of God, or being an ordinary human. Abu Bakr points out that Muhammad maintained that Jesus was not crucified whilst Christians believe to the contrary and claim that he was killed and crucified (1977, 69). Contradicting himself, Jesus claimed that he had come to perfect the Pentateuch while in practice he abrogated and changed its laws and commandments. Similar contradictions could also be found in various scriptures (1977, 69).

In response to the question of contradictions between the messages of different prophets raised by Abu Bakr al-Razi (discussed in chapter 3), Abu Hatim argues that there aren't any intrinsic contradictions in the divine messages (1977, 71). He argues that the messages, traditions, and parables differ in their words but agree in meaning (1977, 94). Investigation into the meaning of the prophets' speech (*kalām*) will reveal that there is a unity of ideas. Abu Hatim, demonstrating his knowledge of the Quran and other scriptures, aims to establish that these scriptures narrate stories in order to make people understand. People who are ignorant of their inner meaning reject them as contradictory.

Abu Hatim further argues that the authenticity of the Prophet can be known through internal evidence such as miracles and revelation. These are treated as tangible 'facts.' Logic is used, too, in order to establish the validity of the religious message rather than through an appeal to religious sentiments.

Abu Hatim, after exposing the contradictions of philosophers on fundamental issues such as the nature of the Creator and the origin and the beginning of the world,

argues that Prophets agreed with regard to such fundamental issues as Allah's unity (*Tawḥīd*) and the office of Prophethood itself. They also agree that Allah created two worlds; the world (*dār* lit. home) of struggle and action and the world of reward and punishment. They all traversed this path and agreed in this regard.

Describing the views of various ancient Greek philosophers, Abu Hatim points out that philosophers lacked this type of agreement on fundamental issues on the Creator and the Universe. Beside these issues, Prophets also agreed in matters concerning social behavior and the practice of faith. They all invited people to do good deeds (*a*'*māl*). They also agreed on fundamentals (*uṣūl*) such as prayer (*ṣalāh*), alms giving (*zakāh*), fasting, pilgrimage (*manāsik*), immolations and other obligations and prescribed practices which are the fundamentals of religion (1977*,* 156).

However, they differed in the execution of the Sharī'ah, for example, fixing the times of prayers or number of units (*raka'āt)* and the direction in which to pray. Hence, they differed only in matters of detail (1977*,* 157). He further argues that these scriptures are often allegorical, sometimes the meaning is plain and sometimes it is concealed, but there is no conflict or contradiction in them. "Their statements that are considered to be contradictory by ignorant, may have a verbal difference but, as far as meaning is concerned, there is a complete agreement since the speech of the Prophets and theosophers (*ḥukamā'*) mostly consists of symbols (*marmūz*). They addressed their nations with wisdom and showed examples, so that everybody can listen, and the learned can teach the commoner" (1977*,* 72).

For Abu Hatim, this method of addressing people through allegories is not unique to prophets alone, even philosopher (who according to Abu Bakr used unambiguous language) use metaphorical language to express their views. "They (philosophers) spoke with

people in two languages; one was spiritual and another was ‘physical.’ By physical ‘allegories’ are meant, and by spiritual 'meaning' is intended” (1977*,* 107). Abu Hatim considers these apparent contradictions as a 'test' for people. Those who look at plain words and remain ignorant of their inner meaning find them contradictory (1977*,* 72).

Abu Hatim does not accept that the original messages of Prophets had any contradictions with fundamental beliefs. For instance, he argues that what is attributed to the Zoroastrian religion concerning duality and to Christians concerning Jesus was not from the teachings of the Prophets but interpretations by neophytes in the respective nations. Either people mixed their own views with those of Prophets as in the case of Zoroastrianism, or they misinterpreted Jesus as the son of Allah in the case of Christian belief. While Jesus may have stated that he was the son of God in the Gospel, it does not mean that he is a physical son of Allah through procreation; rather, it is a sign of his higher state and intimacy with Allah. Similarly, Jesus correctly said, “do not imagine that I have come to abrogate the Torah, I have come to perfect it” (Abu Hatim, 1977, 123).

Abu Hatim indicates an inner consistency and continuity in prophetic messages. Each succeeding Prophet appears to alter and abrogate the Sharī‘ah of the previous Prophet. However, the prophetic tradition remains the same and its continuity ensures the inner harmony and consistency of the message, although its external form changes according to the time and place. It does not, in any sense, damage the intrinsic agreement or rather, the transcendent unity of the messages (1977*,* 124-5). These traditions are eternal in the world (1977, 123).

All Sharī‘ah of the Prophets are based on knowledge and wisdom, and their books and customs are in agreement in meaning. The differences are external since the given allegories are symbols in accordance to the customs of

their nations. They established systems and organizations to manage worldly affairs but beneath the apparent discrepancies, there was one meaning (1977*,* 108).

Each Prophet invited people to his particular Sharīʻah and *aḥkām*, but the objective of all the prophets was to establish the 'True Religion' (*al-dīn al-ḥaqīqī*), in which there is no difference (*tafarruq*) and no conflict (1977*,* 109). The pure religion is one in which there is no difference or conflict. What is attributed to Prophets in terms of abrogation of the exoteric Sharīʻah has one meaning, although there are differences of words (1977*,* 72). Those who know the truth emerge from conflicts and differences of appearance (1977*,* 74). A person who is aware of this prophetic tradition of permanency and inner consistency will be able to envision this truth.

To summarize the concept of prophecy, Abu Hatim believed that the relevance of the prophetic message lies in the function of each prophet of resolution (*ʻaẓm*) to cause the growth of humanity by executing the Sharīʻah. Each of these Prophets was the "pole of the world" (*qutb al-ʻālam*) among people and the focal point around whom matters of religion (*amr al-dīn*) rotated, and who united various nations together. Thus, salvation may be achieved through them and they ensure stability in various matters (Abu Hatim, *Iṣlāḥ,* ff.57-8). Moses and other prophets were able to achieve great accomplishments since they were perfect among the human beings (*akmāl al-bashar*) of their time (Abu Hatim, 1977, 122). When the prophets prescribed customs and traditions, they were aware of their permanent, inner meaning. Each one of them was a pivot in his time for the people. Thus, the dual purpose of Prophethood is that on the one hand, it provides principles for the betterment of human life in this world, and on the other, it protects human souls, so that they may achieve salvation in the life hereafter (Sijistani, 1966, 171).

Divine Communication

Abu Hatim enumerates three basic modes of communication between Allah and a Prophet. Allah communicates with each Prophet according to their ranking within the hierarchy of the prophets. Abu Hatim al-Razi states,

> Allah sends revelation (*waḥy*) through an angel, or in visions (*ru'yā*) or as a thought (*khayāl*) to the heart (*qalb; depth of consciousness*). Prophets belong to various ranks and Allah communicates with them according to their ranks within their Prophetic hierarchy (Abu Hatim, 1977, 52).

In this regard, a major emphasis by Ismaili thinkers is on the existence of mediation between each *ḥadd* (rank), whether the *ḥadd* is in the celestial or the terrestrial sphere. The notion of rank and limit certainly had important implications for the Ismaili da'wah. The idea of receiving knowledge from the appropriate *ḥadd* in the context of Ismaili da'wah means that the person who is at a lower *ḥadd* cannot overstep any stage, and a person necessarily goes through the proper channels of learning and probably of initiation.

Such mediation occurs through spiritual entities for Prophets, whereas the Prophets themselves in their physical form are the mediators for common human beings. Sijistani states that "Allah sends the revelation to the Nāṭiq through the intermediary of the spirit (*rūḥ*) and makes him the light (*nūr*) which guides people on the right path, and which enlightens people; those who receive it, enlighten others" (Corbin, 1970, 41-142). Similarly, "the Prophets are intermediaries who, through their wisdom and capability to manage human affairs, bring ease and comfort to human beings. Through them, knowledge of Allah is achieved and prayers are accepted" (Sijistani, 1966, 60-3).

According to early Ismaili terminology, *jadd* is the mediation between Allah and a messenger. *Jadd* is another name for the Angel Gabriel. Abu Hatim states, "This (esoteric) knowledge is not conveyed directly but through the intermediary of the *jadd"* (*Iṣlāḥ,* f.49). Abu Hatim reasons that even the loftiest of Prophets cannot bear the direct vision of Allah. He gives the example of Moses who was denied the direct vision of Allah (*Iṣlāḥ,* f.49). Explaining the same issue, Sijistani states,

> There are intermediaries (*wasā'it*) between *al-mursil* (the sender) and the messenger (*al-Rasūl*). As much as a messenger is closer to the *mursil* in the chain of intermediaries, his rank is higher than humans who are below him. This determines their status, capacity, and form to receive the message from Allah. The intermediary (*Wasītah*) between is a spiritual creation (*khalq ruḥānī*), who is unlike anything physical (1966, 60).

In *A'lām al-Nubuwwah,* Abu Hatim offers a strong defense of prophecy. Abu Hatim completely rejects the agnostic and antinomian views held by philosophers such as Abu Bakr al-Razi, who did not believe in the existence of the prophetic mode of knowledge, received through the mediation of an angel. Nasir Khusraw also points out that Abu Bakr al-Razi in *Kitāb 'ilm al-Ilāhī* denied that the prophets could receive revelation from Allah, and in fact, accused them of being imposters. Nasir Khusraw quotes Abu Bakr,

> The souls of wrongdoers (*bad kirdarān*), who have become devils (*diwe*), appear to certain people, and say to them; "Go and say to people that an angel has come to me and said: Allah has bestowed upon me Prophecy." Thus, conflicts are created and people are killed (1953, 137).

In *A'lām*, Abu Hatim does not mention this particular view of Abu Bakr on Prophecy that considered the devil as the source of a prophet's knowledge. However, the remaining account concerning the outcome of religious preaching resulting in wars and conflict concurs with Nasir Khusraw's account. It is, indeed, the most severe criticism of prophecy in medieval times (Corbin, 1971-72, 72).

Abu Bakr's criticism was also directed towards the 'visions' of prophets as sources of knowledge, which he found to be without any genuine foundation and too bizarre to be given any credibility. Abu Hatim argues that the visions of Prophets were not ordinary dreams, "These were means of communication with prophets and the way of teaching prophets" (1977, 288). The visions that prophets had were true or veridical dreams. These were of two kinds; those that were plain and did not need text or explanation, and others that were visions (*ru'yā'*) which required interpretation. However, there also are dreams (*aḥlām*), which are due to one's inner disposition (*ṭabī'ah*). Prophets do not have ordinary dreams that lack meaning or reality (1977, 288-9). The information that is conveyed through these dreams consists of events occurring in the future. These dreams also explain the divine message to the prophets (1977, 52).

Thus, visions are interpreted in their appropriate contexts. Such communication is not confined to prophets alone, but inspiration (*tawfiq*) comes from Allah to the pious amongst His servants (*ṣāliḥīn min 'ibādihī*). Esoteric knowledge is transmitted to believers. They are informed about matters of religion and the world. This mode is inspirational. This form of communication is different from Allah's communication with prophets (1977, 288).

Abu Hatim distinguishes these modes from the claims of ordinary people, whose inspiration comes from the doubts of the soul (*wiswās al-nafs*), natural disposition (*al-ṭabī'ah*), defects of the mind (*khifat al-dimāgh*), and Satan (1977, 288). As Abu Hatim points out, "it is important to

receive education from an authoritative teacher who is in position to convey true knowledge and who will not lead people astray" (1977*,* 301).

Abu Hatim attributes a sacred origin to all sciences and forms of knowledge. He refuses to accept the idea that any form of knowledge or research, concerning material or spiritual matters, is possible without divine intervention in some form. It is not possible for any human being to innovate any science or any knowledge whatsoever, based on his own nature and sagacity. Its origin is revelation. Abu Hatim explains, "Those *ḥukamā*' (philosophers/ scientists; singular, *ḥakīm*) were not capable of creating (*ikhtara'*) anything by their sagacity and disposition (*ṭabī'ah*). Its origin is revelation (*waḥy*)" (1977*,* 301).

Abu Hatim believed and aims to prove that Allah did not "disclose it (knowledge) to anybody except those whom He has chosen as messenger" (1977*,* 301). It is based on this knowledge that Prophets are able to establish norms and principles on which various sciences are developed. Later, the famous sufi Ibn al-Arabi echoes the similar ideas about prophetic knowledge. Ibn al-Arabi views align with Ismaili ideas that Apostles differ in knowledge, "the apostles are higher or lower in terms of the knowledge of their mission in exact accordance with the difference that exists among the nations (Izutsu, 1984, 268).

Impact of the Prophetic Message

Abu Hatim, in the course of the debate, comes up with some very interesting arguments. According to his belief, one of the signs of prophecy is that people from different strata of society are attracted by the speech (*kalām*) of prophets. For him, it is not the case (as Abu Bakr criticizes) that the stupid among weak men, women, and children accept religion from their leaders through sheer imitation, and "after a long time these become their nature and habits" (Abu Hatim, 1977, 32).

Abu Bakr looks at the issue of power relationships, where the elites of a society define and establish socio-political norms. The social discourse defines the rules and manners of behavior for people and limits of their freedom. Abu Bakr viewed the relationship between a Prophet and a follower in a socio-political context. This led him to believe that the purpose of the prophetic mission is to establish, maintain, or perpetuate an exploitative relationship between common people and the group of elites. People gathering around an image of a person or system of beliefs create exclusive identities and common interests and come into conflict with other identities and interests causing wars and conflicts.

For Abu Hatim, prophetic knowledge is another dimension of the human experience. It appeals to the inner recesses of the human soul. Even though Ismaili philosophers did not deny a rational understanding of the prophetic message, or its socio-political relevance, the most important aspect of the message, for Abu Hatim, appears to be its appeal to human consciousness and its congruence with the ultimate destiny of humanity. Finally, yet importantly, they were concerned with its integration with a cosmic purpose and meaning. Thus, Abu Hatim emphasizes the unique non-rational dimension of the prophetic message that rational faculties could not capture or comprehend.

Abu Hatim indicates that the presence of power or force (*quwwah*) in the speech (*kalām*) of the Prophets is unique, and philosophical discourse lacked that quality and uniqueness. The words of the Prophets and the revealed books (*al-kutub al-munzalah*) have a force that captures the hearts of elites and commoners alike. He argues,

> Many of those who accepted the *kalām* of the prophets and the revealed books did not know what was in them, but that force gathered the souls by its love until they made these as their distinct characteristics and their protective

> shields. It mingled with their hearts and attracted them to accept these words. Just as the force in the magnetic stone attracts iron, this hidden force attracted the hearts; these books of the Prophets become like a talisman in the world (1977, 60-61).

Likewise, Sijistani states that the evidence for the belief in Prophecy comes from within. The basic commandments of the Prophets provide advice for the good and prohibition of the bad. These commandments correspond to what an intellect would arrive at through its own process of judgment. Human intellects accept the message of a Rasūl based on its congruence with the knowledge innate in their souls, and the message of the prophet evokes this dormant knowledge (1966, 49).

Sijistani suggests some preconditions that may be found in the souls of those who accept the message of a Prophet. The absence of any of these conditions hinders the individual soul from receiving the message. He states, "Those who have sound intellects (*ṣaḥiḥ al-ʻaql*) can receive it." Explaining what he means by sound intellect, he states, "one who has balance (*iʻtidāl*) in his composition (*tarkīb*), and agreement (*ittifāq*) in his temperament (*mizāj*) has a sound intellect and receives the effects *(āthār)* of the Intellect" (1977*,* 50). When the message of Prophet encounters an intellect with inner harmony, the message revives its spiritual life (*al-ḥayah al-ruḥānīyah*) and the awakened intellect becomes the spiritual messenger (*al-Rasūl al-ruḥānī*). Hence, it is incumbent to practice the physical Sharīʻah (*Sharīʻah al-jismānīyah*) brought by the physical messenger. The meeting of the physical and spiritual brings about spiritual fulfillment. Sijistani insists that the spiritual truths brought face to face with the innate intellect (*al-ʻaql al-gharīzī*) are realized only through acceptance and practice of the Sharīʻah brought by a messenger (1977*,* 50).

For Sijistani, the innate intellect (*al-ʻaql al-gharīzī*) in a human being gives her the power of discrimination that is bestowed by the First Messenger (*al-Rasūl al-awwal*), referring to the first Intellect who implanted basic knowledge and receptivity in the human soul. When the physical messenger (*al-Rasūl al-jismānīyah),* who is the terrestrial pole of the First Intellect, brings speech (*kalām*) (1977, 50), the inner intellectual capacity, if unpolluted, will spontaneously respond to it and will be ready to receive it. Both messages are in total agreement with each other. Hence, the innate quality of balance in the intellect of a human being in its sound state, will find the message of the physical messenger in accordance with rational principles and human needs.

For Abu Bakr, philosophy is based on two factors:

1. The endeavors of philosophers to attain knowledge, including research and analysis.
2. The utility of philosophical and scientific knowledge.

Abu Bakr states that philosophers discover sciences through careful investigation (*bi daqqa naẓar*) and inspiration by virtue of their subtle dispositions (*bi laṭāfat ṭabaʻa),* such as the knowledge of medicaments and their qualities. They conduct research on the movements of spheres and stars, mathematics, and knowledge of quantity, the width of the earth, its length, and the distance between spheres (Abu Hatim, 1977, 274). Abu Bakr finds a value and utility in these discoveries for human beings, which he thinks, is lacking in the prophetic mode of knowledge. He argues, "Where have these prophets mentioned anything about remedies, or movements of stars, or arithmetic? The books of philosophers are more useful than the books of prophets" (1977, 274).

Abu Hatim rejects the philosophers' claims concerning the ability of the human intellect to acquire knowledge of the world and the Creator (1977, 132). He considers such

claims and attainments to be absurd and impossible without divine assistance.

Abu Hatim acknowledges that the wise men whom Abu Bakr considers as the founders of the sciences were indeed the wise men in their times and leaders in their nations. In this instance, he does not use the title 'Prophet' but refers to them as 'wise men' (*ḥukamā'*) and leaders (*a'immah*) who founded the sciences of astronomy, arithmetic, and medicine. Their names differ among different groups of people. Allah made them the evidence (*ḥujjah*) for His creation and supported them with revelation, and taught them wisdom (*ḥikmah*). He gave each one of them one kind of *ḥikmah*; to some he gave the science of medicine, to others, arithmetic, or knowledge about nature. They went out to the people and conveyed to them what Allah wanted His creatures to know concerning the principles of *ḥikmah*, and to make known the status of these Prophets (1977, 275).

Abu Hatim considers the origin of the sciences as divine. He identifies ancient philosophers with ancient Prophets, or divinely inspired *ḥukamā'.* Abu Hatim states that the science of astrology started with Prophet Idris. Interpreting the Quranic verse XIX: 57, which says, "And we raised him to a high station," Abu Hatim states that Allah raised him to the mountain, which was in the center of the earth, and sent an angel down to him who taught him about the cause of the spheres, the *ḥudūd,* and the signs of the zodiac. Identifying Hermes with the Prophet Idris, Abu Hatim said, "It is said that the Hermes known to philosophy is Idris. He is known as Hermes in philosophy and Idris in the Quran. Similarly, there are many who are known differently among philosophers and in religion" (1977, 278).

Abu Hatim also points out that Adam had knowledge concerning nature and food. Allah taught him the names. These names included all the necessary knowledge required for religious and worldly life. Abu Hatim states,

> On this earth, life is not possible even for a single day if one does not know what benefits bodies and what will hurt them, ...If we take this knowledge back in history, as the heretic suggested, it will not go back to Plotinus or Galen but it goes far back in the past.... Before them people must be using remedies and had some knowledge of physiology, and it goes back to Adam. Plotinus and Galen added to it with divine support (*ta'yīd*) and revelation from Him. The medium for this was the helping prophet, and these prophets are our leaders.... Nothing would have been known if it was not through revelation to the prophets who are *ḥukamā'*. Nobody is capable of knowing the nature of things through his intellect and sagacity alone (1977, 280-1).

Several Muslim theologians, such as al-Ghazali, accepted the idea that divine assistance is required to attain knowledge including scientific knowledge (Watt, 1982, 65). The argument is that the sciences are not part of human nature but are acquired. For this reason, not everybody has knowledge of sciences, but a person can acquire scientific knowledge through divine assistance.

The Forms of Prophetic Messages

Abu Hatim al-Razi, in his *Kitāb al-Iṣlāḥ*, divides the Sharī'ah into two essentially compatible parts, *al-Sharī'ah al-ẓāhir* and al-*Sharī'ah al-bāṭin.* The enunciator Prophet (*Nāṭiq*) has the task of preaching the exoteric aspect of the Sharī'ah and its exposition is entrusted to his *Asās* (Abu Hatim, *Iṣlāḥ*, f.50).

The external aspect of Sharī'ah consists of the traditions of a Nāṭiq in the form of exoteric commandments of religion concerning obligations (*fara'iḍ*) based on revelation and *sunnah*. Prophets also relate parables (*amthāl*, sing. *mithāl*) in plain words, that

do not command or prohibit, but which contain wisdom. These are also a part of the Sharīʻah (*Iṣlāḥ,* f.54).

The esoteric aspects of Sharīʻah indicate concealed subtleties (*al-laṭā'if al-mustajinah*) that encapsulate the meaning of allegories. This process is called *ta'wīl* (*Iṣlāḥ,* f.63). These were essential parts of the Sharīʻah and were prescribed by Nāṭiqs according to the needs of their respective periods. All prophets also prescribed *a'māl* (acts) that have an integral esoteric dimension (*bāṭin*). This esoteric dimension can be discovered through the process of *ta'wīl* (*Iṣlāḥ,* f.64). Neither can exist without the other.

For Abu Hatim, since both aspects of the Sharīʻah are indispensable, the practice of the Sharīʻah is very important and is the only way by which one might have access to the esoteric dimension and inner wisdom. "The knowledge of *Tawḥīd* of Allah is not possible without acts (*a*ʻ*māl*), traditions (*rusūm*), and signs (*ishārāt*) from the *Nāṭiq*. They compiled their traces (*āthār*) and the *sharā'i'* that became proofs (*shawāhid*) for those Prophets who come after them" (*Iṣlāḥ*, f.77). He also categorically states that the purpose of religion remains unfulfilled and the bliss of eternal life in the hereafter will not be attained without discovering inner wisdom.

Citing an example, he states that this wisdom (*bāṭin*, or *ta'wīl*) is like water, a source of life. Knowledge is life for all those who believe in a religion; it is the cause of eternal life and carries people to the eternal life in the hereafter. The Sharīʻah is like the path leading to the water. The Sharīʻah that consists of the traditions (*rusūm*) of the enunciators (*Nāṭiq*) points towards the truth of knowledge (*ḥaqā'iq al-'ulūm*) (*Iṣlāḥ*, f.55). This dual aspect of the Sharīʻah provides knowledge and the practical advice necessary for social and individual life. It is evident that Sharīʻah is not merely the compendium of laws for Abu Hatim, but includes ethics, which cover broader aspects of human life.

A unique feature of the prophetic messages, as understood by Ismaili writers, is that all of them have a common purpose and meaning despite variations and apparent differences. In this manner, all *sharā'i'* are linked with each other. This link is a continuation in history that does not make a Sharī'ah valid for the periods of other prophets who succeed. Sijistani explains that when a Prophet is sent with a Sharī'ah, his Sharī'ah remains amongst the people for a long time after the Prophet is gone. It is a time when the inner wisdom and secrets of the Sharī'ah unfold. However, a time comes when it decays after achieving its objectives, and then Allah sends another Sharī'ah. Sijistani mentions its recurrence "more or less after a thousand years" (1966, 38). Towards the end of *Ithbāt*, we find a statement mentioning a time span of fifteen hundred years (1966, 192). The Prophet of the new era introduces new laws and limits (*ḥudūd*) (1966, 72). The reason for the abrogation of a Sharī'ah is that "after a long time, the Sharī'ah becomes empty of "the spirit of the second age" (*ruḥ al-'aṣr al-thāni*), particularly, after the advancement of human beings with the expansion of knowledge, [and] their intelligence and mental faculties" (1966, 76).

This means that if a person does not accept the new Prophet, she/he remains in the period of the previous Prophet. In this sense, she/he does not progress with the new divine message and remains stagnant. When a new Sharī'ah is introduced, it is not a complete break from the previous Sharī'ah. In a historical sense, there is continuity, which shows the parallel progress of the divine message along with the intellectual and social progress of humanity. This progress implies that if people refuse to accept the new message, they regress historically and spiritually, since both appear to be linked together in Ismaili thought.

With respect to its content, a new Sharī'ah derives much from the previous Sharī'ah. After all, "the source and origin of all shari'ah is the same and one" (1966, 76).

This interpretation with emphasis on the principle of change goes well with the Ismaili concept of Imāmah. The Imam of the time represents the unchanging, permanent principles of faith alongside the ever-changing personalities of the Imams.

Sijistani, indicating the uniformity and permanency of the principle as found in the inner meaning of the message and its changing external forms, states that the Sharī'ah is like a body whose soul is the Word of Allah (*Kalām Allah*). The life of a body is possible because of the soul. Similarly, when the Word of Allah, which is the soul of a Sharī'ah, withdraws from one Sharī'ah, it becomes a putrid corpse. The Word mingles with another Sharī'ah and makes it living and manifest. Those who respond to the living Sharī'ah positively, receive life and progress from the sensory life (*al-ḥayah al-ḥissīyah*) to the eternal spiritual life (*al-ḥayah al-nafsānīyah al-a'īdīyah*) (1966, 70).

Sijistani notes the exception to the Prophethood of Muhammad since he believed that Prophet Muhammad was the last Prophet and there were not going to be any other Prophets after him. Hence, the Quranic message is here to stay and the Imam of the time has a responsibility to interpret it for believers. However, there is a caveat in respect to the interpretation of the divine message. This interpretation may not be literal meaning of the text. It could be beneath several layers of meanings and interpretation. It will not be possible for a neophyte to connect text with the meaning. To elaborate further, the message from the Imam of the time would not be the exact translation or interpretation of specific verses of the Quran that a person could visually or textually connect with, but his messages esoterically and innately decipher the meaning and intent of the *āyāt* of the Quran and the Prophet's teachings. Their meanings and cultural contexts will constantly change with each Imam and within a Imam's lifetime according to the needs of the time and

changing understanding of believers. Such a concept works well with the continuity of *Imāmah* in Ismaili thought.

The personality of Muhammad is considered the most inspiring and motivating force for Muslims over the last fourteen hundred years. Even his most severe critics do not deny his impact on the sociopolitical and religious history of the world. Despite the devotion expressed by Muslims, there were people who raised questions about his sociopolitical role and his career as a prophet.

As a rationalist philosopher, Abu Bakr examined a number of psychological and normative questions about Prophecy and religion. Living among believers, his questioning was very bold. However, the significant point here is that Abu Bakr was able to perceive those sociopolitical issues, which were interlinked and legitimized in the name of religion.

Abu Hatim generally confined himself to a more literalist analysis of Islamic doctrine and "historical data" in his debate with Abu Bakr. The emphasis that Ismailis laid on the constant presence of divine guidance in different forms, such as Prophethood and *Imāmah* rotating in a cyclical manner, is absent from the debate. The debate between the two Razis' on the role of Muhammad is not discussed within the context of speculative philosophy but is seen through tangible historical and social lenses.

It is difficult to assert whether the approach that Abu Hatim adopted was a response to a philosopher's query or a believer's faith. However, his method in *al-A'lām al-Nubuwwah* is entirely different from his approach in the *Kitāb al-lṣlāḥ*. It shows that his intention in *A'lām,* was to address a group of people who were not inclined towards the Ismaili form of speculative philosophy and were more akin to the literal and exoteric aspects of the religion.

Thus, two different images of Muhammad are projected from these two approaches. In *lṣlāḥ*, Muhammad is portrayed as a Nāṭiq in the long chain of the prophets. In

this image, the prophecy of Muhammad is seen in a cyclical history moving forward towards the ultimate fulfillment of humanity. In this regard, the emphasis is more on continuity rather than interruptions, similarities rather than contrasts. The emergence of Prophets is not considered as isolated events in world history; rather, they are all linked together in a single web of meaning and purpose.

The other image of Muhammad that is projected in *A'lām* focuses on his role as a Prophet placed in a historical context and connected with other prophets with distinct historical roles, sociopolitical orientations, and cultural and geographical backgrounds. In this regard, the emphasis is on Muhammad's uniqueness, his personal virtues and qualities. In this approach, history, and traditions become important as does the prophet's role within sociopolitical spheres. This approach has limited cosmological and eschatological implications.

Evidences concerning the Prophecy of Muhammad

Abu Hatim considers that Muhammad came with evidences (*dalā'il*) and miracles (*mu'jizah*) in order to authenticate his claim to Prophecy. Abu Hatim makes a distinction between miracles and evidences. According to him, "The evidences (*dalā'il*) of Muhammad and his miracles are many. The causes (*asbāb*), which are brought by the Prophets (*al-anbiyā'*), are such that others are helpless to bring similar ones. For this reason, they are called miracles. These also give evidence for his truthfulness and claim to Prophecy. Therefore, these are called evidences (*dalā'il*)" (1977, 193).

Hence, miracles are part of the prophetic disposition and occur through the Prophet. Since Abu Hatim attributes this ability exclusively to prophets, one can presume that they occur due to some inner prophetic quality. They may be called the "internal evidence" of Prophecy. Thus, Abu Hatim notes, "We will mention some of the proofs

(*dalā'il*) and miracles of Muhammad, the like of which are not in the capacity of man to produce except with the assistance (*ta'yīd*) of Allah" (Abu Hatim, 1977, 191).

The reasons that are external to a Prophet and indicate or verify his Prophethood are outer proofs. For instance, "There is the statement that a prophet bears witness for one who comes after him, and indicates him, as are the evidences in the Pentateuch, the Gospel and in other books concerning the Prophecy of Muhammad" (1977, 193). In addition to these evidences, Abu Hatim creates another category of *dalā'il,* which he calls *āyāt* (signs) of Prophecy that are comprised of predictions and poetic compositions by soothsayers concerning the Prophecy of Muhammad.

External Evidences: Muhammad in Revealed Scriptures

Abu Hatim interprets prior scriptures to show evidences for the appearance of Muhammad. He cites the Pentateuch, where Allah addresses the Israelites, saying, "I will establish a Prophet amongst your brothers, I will make my speech through his mouth" (Abu Hatim, 1977, 195). Abu Hatim interprets the brothers of the Banu Israil to mean the Banu Ismail. The Prophet who appeared from the Banu Ismail is Muhammad. Similarly, there is a prediction, which mentions that a Prophet will appear from the mountains of Fārān. This is taken to be an indication of Muhammad's appearance from Mecca, that is located in the midst of the mountains of Fārān (1977, 195).

Abu Hatim also mentions the reference to a Prophet in the Psalms who, along with his concern for the poor, would live a contemplative life and "his mention will remain forever and his authority will cover one ocean to the other" (1977, 193). Abu Hatim finds all these qualities in the person of Muhammad. Muhammad being the last Prophet points to his name being remembered till the end of the time and his religion Islam being spread all over the world. He states that "the *Sharī'ah* of Muhammad is connected with the *qiyāmah* which will not be abrogated.

There will be no Prophet after him" (1977, 193). He finds further evidence in the Gospel of Jesus. Jesus states,

> I am going, and there will come to you "*al-bāriqalīt*" the 'Spirit of the Truth' (*ruḥ al-ḥaqq*) who has never declared himself before. He will teach you all the things. He will bear witness for me as I bore witness for him. He will be sent with my name (*bi-ismī*) (1977, 196).

This similarity of names is interpreted by Abu Hatim as a similarity of Sharī'ah. Hence, this statement indicates the status to which Muhammad belonged. He has the privilege that "the Spirit of the Truth" would speak through him for the first time. He would have such vast knowledge that he would be able to teach everything. In this manner, the status of Muhammad is raised above all other prophets.

Abu Hatim, while discussing the signs of Prophethood, considers one of the important signs to be the verification of each Prophet by the one who precedes and succeeds him. According to this notion, Muhammad's appearance would be mentioned by the prophets before him and he, in turn, would testify to the truth of their Prophecy (1977, 193). Of course, since there is no prophet after Muhammad, he does not mention anyone appearing after him as a prophet. Abu Hatim considers such information as comprising very important evidences (*dalā'il*) of Prophethood.

Internal Evidences

Abu Hatim notes that there are two types of miracles, which provide the internal evidences of Muhammad's Prophecy:

1. The greatest miracle of Muhammad is the revelation from Allah, which he received and

which is accessible to all in the form of the Book, the Quran (1977, 192).

2. The occurrence of miracles through him in the form of supernormal happenings or "breaches of habitual events" (*khārq al-ʻādāt*).

Later Muslim scholars such as Qadi Abd al-Jabbar also considered the Quran as a miracle and the evidence of truth of Muhammad's Prophethood. Qadi Abd al-Jabbar states, "Muhammad had many miracles but the best of them was the Quran; others were helpless to produce something similar" (al-Jabbar, 1966, 586).

Both these categories were subject to criticism by Abu Bakr al-Razi. On the miracles of Prophets, as mentioned earlier, he wrote a book, which did not survive. However, Abu Hatim reports Abu Bakr's views on the Quran. The revelation in the form of the Quran belongs to the first category of miracles. "The word *iʻjāz* had come to mean that quality of the Quran that rendered people incapable of imitating the Book or any part thereof in content and form" (Boullata, 1986, 87).

Abu Hatim devoted an entire chapter to the issue of the miraculous nature of the Quran. In this chapter, he records Abu Bakr's criticism of religious knowledge and his own reply justifying this mode of knowledge and affirming the existence of a "miracle" in it. Abu Hatim reports that Abu Bakr said,

> You claim that the Quran is 'the eternal existing miracle' (*muʻjizah qā'imah mawjūdah*), and you said that the one who denies this should bring its like. You implored me to bring something like that into reality that is superior to the discourse (*kalām*), meaning the Quran (Abu Hatim, 1977, 227).

Abu Hatim al-Razi's argument is that the miracle that the Quran contains includes literary merits that are not found in any other literary composition (1977, 238).

Indeed, it is considered to have all merits combined within a single literary piece, which is highly improbable in any other work. According to the Quran, "We called upon jinn and men to bring forth something like this Quran, but they could not" (1977, 235).

However, Abu Bakr felt that there were other works that were of excellent literary qualities that could be forwarded for the sake of comparison. This issue is highly controversial and it is difficult to state categorically that the Quran can be compared to other pieces of literature. Abu Hatim only points out that Abu Bakr noted the existence of works that contain all the merits that a literary composition could have (1977, 228). Abu Bakr is also reported to have said that the Quran records the stories of *asāṭīr al-awwalīn* (stories of bygone people). He suggests that it is full of contradictions and these do not have any benefit, nor do they explain anything, or aid one's understanding.

Abu Hatim refers to a Quranic verse (XXVI: 154-56) and argues that the views of Abu Bakr are not different from those of unbelievers and the misguided (*ahl al-kufr wa al-ḍalālah*), who slandered the Quran with the same accusations, but were unable to produce anything similar to it. The reason, according to Abu Hatim, was not a question of literary merits, but of divine creation. Producing something like the Quran is like creating the heavens and the earth. Only Allah has the power to create such a thing.

Hence, the notion of the Quran as being a miracle lies in the belief that Allah revealed it. Nothing else can have this prerogative. Thus, the thrust of Abu Hatim's argument is placed on its reference to the transcendent that makes it sacred and miraculous, which nothing profane can have. Abu Bakr's argument, on the contrary, was that the Quran does not have the utility similar to what one finds in the books of mathematics, medicine, astronomy, and physiology. It does not help one to discover the hidden

(1977, 299). In this sense, those books, either because of their literary qualities or because of their utility, are better than the revealed books. Hence, according to Abu Bakr's definition, the Quran does not impart any knowledge. Abu Hatim's reaction is to condemn Abu Bakr as misguided and ignorant of those 'great matters' (*umūr 'aẓīmah*) that the Quran contains (1977, 230).

Abu Hatim refers to the perspectives of people without faith who failed to perceive the divine nature and roots of the Quran. Such people mistook those divine signs as magic. Abu Hatim gives the example of Moses and Jesus who performed miracles, which magicians were unable to perform. They eventually realized that the miracles performed by Moses and Jesus were not magic. Yet, the people who lacked insight considered them mere magical acts (1977, 231).

The impact of the revelation on the human spirit, according to Abu Hatim, is very different from the impact of magic. The impact that revelation creates cannot be created by magic. It affects the human psyche and transforms it. This transformation is complete and thorough; it converts a staunch opponent into a faithful believer (1977, 246-7). Similarly, people demanded from Muhammad to show them signs, but after witnessing those signs, they rejected them as magic. Abu Hatim states, "They demanded from him (Muhammad) the signs. All those who witness the signs said, "It is magic." As when he split the moon, they said, "this is a hidden magic" (1977, 233).

Abu Hatim argues that even a Prophet could not produce those miracles by himself except with the power of Allah. Allah's power works through Prophets and they manifest the signs. This innate power manifests itself through revelation; since Allah gives it, it remains within the revelation even after the demise of a prophet. Abu Hatim states, "Because the act of magic is false, it does not remain in the world. The Quran is the miracle of

Muhammad; it will remain forever in the world, and its power will increase with the passing of the days" (1977, 234).

For Abu Hatim, scriptures are embedded with the innate power that made them qualitatively different from literary works. Innate power in scriptures brings about changes in human lives, and therein lies the miracle of the Quran. In a mystical statement, Abu Hatim mentions how the revelation affected the spirit of Muhammad and other human beings. He states,

> What was revealed to him at the station of illumination (*bi manzilah ḍiyā'*) manifested itself in the world. Similarly, it was illuminated in the hearts of people. Those human beings who were closest to him in purity accepted it, although it was not human closeness but spiritual proximity (1977, 242-3).

For Abu Hatim, the Quran provided principles for moral conduct and a normative order for society. These principles derived from the Quran cover various aspects of human life and can be further elaborated as the principles of a legal system and practices of a religious life (1977, 238-9). Abu Hatim further states that in the Quran, we find reports about the past and news about the future; it has laws (*Sharī'ah*) and etiquette (*adab*).

Muhammad was an *ummī* (unlettered); he never mixed with kings or nobles, scholars or writers. It was only through divine support and revelation that he could compile this book (1977, 239). Abu Hatim notes that Muhammad, though lacking formal education and the opportunity to mingle with the elite, was able to produce a book containing laws and principles for human behavior, and this in itself is a miracle.

Abu Hatim also considered the Quran to exceed any book of astrology or mathematics in significance since it

contains the principles of social interaction. "Human beings can live without such scientific books but not without those laws, which maintain peace and harmony in human society. Such is the benefit derived from the Quran."

An interesting argument that Abu Hatim forwards is that the Quran becomes part of the believer's consciousness. He states that books of mathematics and astrology have been in existence since the last thousand years but very few people know what is in them. As far as the Quran is concerned, although people may not know its legal implications and rules, every Muslim would know some suras (1977, 240).

Abu Hatim brings this important aspect of religious belief to attention. Not all the benefits of religion and its role in human lives are as tangible as the returns a person could see in commercial or professional activities. However, religion is greatly concerned with the psychological and spiritual well-being of people. The Quran resides in the heart of believers as a strong divine power. It affects their behavior and way of life. There is an inner power in the Quran that transforms the lives of believers. It gives them strength to be steadfast and patient in ordeals.

Abu Hatim gives the example of Bilal who was tortured due to his acceptance of Islam but remained steadfast; such was also the case of early Muslims who migrated first to Abyssinia and later to Medina leaving all their belongings behind (1977, 248). They were also successful in their struggle for the cause of Islam due to the power of revelation (1977, 249). It was due to the effect of this power that they responded to the call of Muhammad, abandoned all the desires of the world, and obeyed him (1977, 250). Hence, the healing power of the Quran assists believers during difficult times and helps them overcome their difficulties. The great miracle of the Quran is that its power continues to increase and the

Prophecy of Muhammad is professed daily, along with profession of faith in the unity of Allah (1977, 255). Abu Hatim insists that the basis of all laws, as well as all sciences, is divine and that there were prophets who laid the principles and foundations of all sciences that humanity knows.

In the *A'lām*, Abu Hatim takes the miracles attributed to Muhammad literally. These are accepted as real occurrences and are considered as important signs of Prophethood. All Prophets had the power to perform miracles that were evidences of Prophethood. Those who did not accept the Prophets were unable to deny their power to perform miracles. For example, Jesus healed lepers, restored the eyesight of the blind, and revived the dead to life (1977, 91). Similarly, when Muhammad proclaimed Prophecy, he performed numerous miracles.

Abu Hatim spends an entire chapter recording all the miracles attributed to Muhammad in biographical literature, including the supernormal events related to the birth of Muhammad. For example, during his birth, fourteen balconies in the palace of the Persian King collapsed and the King was informed about Arab conquests (1977, 198). Similarly, Abu Hatim also narrates how the idols, kept in the Ka'abah, spoke to Abd al-Muttalib informing him about the great future of his grandson (1977, 200). Similar, too, is the event where a fox testified the Prophecy of Muhammad (1977, 201-2). These supernormal events are considered as definitive indications of the supernatural powers that Muhammad had. They also imply the Prophet's domination over other creatures.

Another category of miracles, of which Abu Hatim speaks, is the foreknowledge of events that were to occur in the future or in remote geographical regions. An example of this is the report that the Prophet informed people regarding the death of the King of Abyssinia who was believed to be a Muslim convert. Thus, Muhammad

had the power to know things that happened in remote places and in different times. (1977, 198)

The third category of miracles that Abu Hatim describes are those in which Muhammad, by using his prophetic power, was able to change events in his favor. Such is the case with the incident where he helped his companions in the battlefield to victory in the battle of Badr in 2 AH. It was the first major armed confrontation between the Muslims and the Quraysh (Andrae, 1957, 144-6); or in 9 AH, when Muhammad sent an expedition to Tabuk in north-west Arabia. During the expedition, when Muslim forces ran out of water, a spring gushed forth through the power of the Prophet (1977, 168).

One important and indeed, unique miracle which Abu Hatim sees in the life of Muhammad was his celestial journey (*mi'rāj*). The next morning following the event, the Prophet was able to give exact details about the places he visited and the events that took place on earth while he was on his journey (1977, 222).

However, it is interesting to note that Abu Hatim al-Razi approaches these themes differently in the *A'lām* and the *Iṣlāḥ*. For example, the *mi'rāj*, as reported in the *A'lām*, closely adheres to traditional accounts of the event. However, in *Kitāb al-Iṣlāḥ,* Abu Hatim goes into an allegorical interpretation of the event.

According to this interpretation, it was the prophet's ascension from one *ḥadd* of the religious hierarchy to another. He ascended from the level of al-Tālī to the level of al-Sābiq, i.e. from the *Masjid al-Haram* to *al-Aqsa*. He achieved the rank of the Nāṭiq, which is the highest and furthest rank in the hierarchy. The ascension occurred during the night, which means that there were two *ḥudūd*, al-Tālī, and al-Sābiq. They were hidden and their station was not known until Muhammad, by riding *al-Burāq*, i.e. *al-Jadd* (Gabriel) rose to the heavens and encountered them (*Iṣlāḥ,* f.117).

Further, in *A'lām*, Abu Hatim mentioned the miracle of the splitting of the moon (*inshiqāq*) and emphasizes that many people who were present at that time witnessed this event (1977, 223). However, in *Iṣlāḥ*, he goes into an allegorical interpretation of the event and mentions that the splitting of the Moon meant disclosing the news of the *Asās*. This difference in focus suggests that *ta'wīl* cannot be disclosed to those who are uninitiated. Therefore, in the presence of the uninitiated, Abu Hatim confined himself to a narrative, avoiding any allegorical (*ta'wīl*) interpretations.

Muhammad as the Role Model

Apart from the divine revelation and miracles as necessary conditions for Prophecy, the other conditions mentioned by Abu Hatim are based on the achievements and the higher moral standards that prophets establish. These are the essential conditions of Prophethood. For Muslims, Muhammad was a perfect human being and his model behavior is considered worthy of imitation. To a Muslim, it is unimaginable to think about Muhammad as lacking any moral qualities found in human beings. Muslims perceive all the activities of the Prophet, whether political or social, as having a profound religious significance.

For centuries, Muslims have believed that a dichotomy of the sacred and profane does not exist in Islam. Nasr states, "This reality encompasses everything and integrates all apparent diversities into one existence" (1966, 7). Elsewhere, Nasr argues, "in essence, therefore, everything is sacred and nothing profane because everything bears within itself the fragrance of the Divine" (Nasr, 1981, 15). This intermarriage of the sacred and the profane took place due to the roles the Prophet played in both spheres of human life.

Although the unity of these two dimensions of human life was found most perfectly in the person of the Prophet, it remained an ideal to be sought by Muslims, who were

spatially and temporally remote from the Prophet. The role Muhammad played is quite different from the roles played by Jesus and Moses for their respective communities. If combined together, then the true image of the Prophet of Islam emerges.

The idea of the unity of the sacred and profane does not suggest an operational and functional unity, but implies an intrinsic unity of purpose and meaning. It is an important aspect of Muslim piety that all mundane affairs are tied together by referring them to the Sacred. Due to this understanding, even a small act in Islam is given a transcendent reference and purpose. This ultimately means that in spite of the apparent diversity and functional separation, everything is interlinked in the consciousness of a Muslim. This is exactly the core purpose of the ethics of Muhammad, which aims to keep the moral order intact, retain a consciousness of the Sacred alive and make the presence of the Transcendent felt.

The Ikhwan al-Safa note that Allah combined all the qualities of kingship and prophecy in Muhammad. However, they insist,

> You must know that when Allah combined kingship with prophecy, He did not increase his (Muhammad's) inclination (*raghabah*) and greed towards the world. Allah intended to combine in his *ummah* religion and the world. However, the first objective is the religion; the kingship is an accident (Ikhwan, 1957, III, 496).

Abu Hatim states,

> So if there is a leader (Imam) in the present case, it was Muhammad who was perfect and in him were gathered all the praiseworthy qualities which could be found in man, such as the truthfulness, trustworthiness, intelligence, patience, mannerisms, dignity, good morals,

> modesty, generosity, bravery, softness of the heart, and compassion for the one who came under his protection and obeyed him, forgiveness, when he overwhelmed those who denied him and opposed him. All other praiseworthy qualities, which could be found in human beings, are found in him (1977, 76).

The Ikhwan al-Safa describe the following qualities of a prophet, “It is necessary that he (the Prophet) should be an intelligent person, with good morals, plain speech, clear language, excellent expression, who remembers whatever he hears” (Rasa'il, II, 232). According to Abu Hatim al-Razi, not all these qualities can possibly be found together in one person, since everybody has some contradictions. However, “in Muhammad, all these qualities are collected” (Abu Hatim, 1977, 76).

An important aspect of Abu Hatim’s defense of Prophecy and religion is his reliance on the biographical literature on Muhammad. Those who were present to witness the debate as well as his opponent were presumably, well-educated members of society who must have been aware of these biographical details. Muhammad's moral excellence is taken as a sign of the truth of his Prophecy. Abu Hatim argues that Muhammad was well-known for his moral standing and character. Even the people who opposed him testified to his moral qualities before he proclaimed Prophecy. This means that he also had a composed and well-balanced disposition and was not subject to inconsistency and contradictions.

Abu Hatim presents Muhammad as an exemplar. He projects a simple and straightforward picture of Muhammad. Muhammad was a person with high moral values, strong will power, and courage, always willing to help others; he faced tribulations with great endurance and patience and faced his opponents in wars with skill, and in victory, with compassion. Before he proclaimed Prophecy, he was considered to be truthful and trustworthy by the

Quraysh, "[They] called him truthful and trustworthy (*al-ṣādiq al-amīn*) because of their confidence in him and their knowledge of him as truthful, before his appearance in Prophecy" (1977, 77). According to Abu Hatim, they also trusted him for his intelligence. He cites the example of the construction of the Ka'bah in Mecca. Abu Hatim claims, "The Quraysh admitted that they found him the most perfect among the people of his time and consented on his best qualities (*al-khiṣāl al-ḥamīdah*)" (1977, 74).

Abu Hatim also emphasizes the social aspect of the Prophet's life. Muhammad had all the high moral and intellectual qualities that qualified him for Prophecy. Abu Hatim al-Razi's reply to Abu Bakr's criticism on Prophets was that the Prophets were perfect in moral qualities and in their intellects during their periods. Should they not be guides to other human beings? In making a comparison with rulers, Abu Hatim observes,

> Kings in their period and [rulers] dominant in their times lose [possessions and power] when they die. However, the tradition of Muhammad will remain until eternity. His honor and nobility is linked with the *qiyāmah* (1977, 89).

Abu Hatim renders this special character to the Prophecy of Muhammad. All prophets were virtuous, but Muhammad was exceptional because the ethics that he introduced had enduring qualities. As noted, Abu Hatim considered that the ethics of Muhammad would remain in the world until the *qiyāmah.*

Moses and Jesus traversed similar paths but they did not reach the stage of Muhammad, although both of them had all the best qualities. Each one of them was perfect among the people of his time. "They possessed all the qualities that were required in a leader for the management of worldly and religious matters" (Abu Hatim, 1977, 89). Their opponents could deny their Prophecy but not their intelligence. Abu Hatim's interest focuses on the Prophets'

insight to manage community affairs, their power to perform miracles, and their ethics, which made them leaders. He emphasizes these qualities in the prophetic role of Muhammad while also highlighting them in the lives of other Prophets.

Abu Hatim responds to Abu Bakr’s criticism on the Prophet by drawing comparisons to the qualities held by other Prophets, especially in addressing the issue regarding the superiority of a Prophet over other human beings and the value of the Prophetic missions. He considers that the characteristics held by a Prophet cover all the essential qualities that a leader could possess. A Prophet is a divinely appointed individual, and hence has qualities that are superior to any other human being. For Abu Hatim, a prophet is the ideal ruler.

Abu Hatim’s arguments probably did not convince his philosophical opponent, but they could have had a powerful impact on his audience, since the tradition of listening to the narratives of prophets was intrinsic to Muslim cultures, and still exists in many literary forms. The sermon-like rendition of the defense may have entertained the audience but probably would not have satisfied the philosopher's inquiring mind.

Chapter 5

Abu Ya‘qub al-Sijistani on *Nubuwwah*

Abu Ya‘qub al-Sijistani (d. ca. 393/1002-3) is one of the most prominent Ismaili *dā‘īs* known for his contribution to Neoplatonism in Islamic philosophy and the development of early Ismaili thought (Walker, 1976).

Sijistani's book *Kitāb Ithbāt al-Nubuwwah* is a major writing on the subject of Prophecy. In this work, he develops his arguments about the validity and affirmation of Prophecy in general, and Prophet Muhammad in particular. He bases his arguments on the qualitative diversity and hierarchical organization of all creations.

Sijistani considers prophets to be distinguished due to their unique relationship with the First Intellect, the Sābiq. People do not select or elect Prophets and prophecy is not an acquired skill or knowledge. Prophets are born with prophecy because they have intellects and souls that are pure, enabling them to receive spiritual bliss and knowledge directly from the Universal Soul. Hence, they inhere the totality of leadership and human qualities that is not possessed by others and they establish a just system in which all humans are treated equally and fairly. They have the knowledge and the spiritual nexus to the celestial

world that give them the ability to guide human beings on their spiritual journey.

Sijistani fosters the concept of ‘rational mysticism’ that became a distinguishing feature of Sufi thought with Ibn Tufayl (d. 581/1185), Ibn Rushd (595/1198) and Ibn al-Arabi (d. 637/1240). Rational mysticism considers that the two cosmic forces of love and intellect constantly regenerate creation and life. These two forces keep the entire cosmos and everything within it in motion. Such power and energy are manifested in all creation. They are epitomized in the person of the Prophet, who has the ardent desire to be in union with his Creator and the Intellect that allowed him to create a Universal religion, providing Muslims, in particular, and humanity in general, a holistic path to discover their destiny like the Prophets. Hence, the Universal Intellect with these prime qualities of love and intelligence is perpetually operating in the universe.

Abu Ya‘qub al-Sijistani’s *Kitāb Ithbāt al-Nubuwwah* offers similar arguments to those of Abu Hatim while applying philosophical perspectives. Yet, he goes a step beyond and spends a considerable part of his book discussing the metaphysics of *Nubuwwah*. He exquisitely integrates Neoplatonic ideas into his discussions on the nature, status, and function of the Prophet. Later Ismaili writers such as Nasir Khusraw and Nasir al-din Tusi adopted and interpreted his pioneering ideas.

The Spiritual Nature of Creation

Sijistani views the entire universe and metaphysical cosmos as an interconnected whole. The material world is dense and the most remote from the Source, but it still benefits from the spiritual fountainhead of the creation. According to him, the atom is the primordial substance (primary matter), which is divided into soul and body. These two possess four qualities corresponding to the four levels of creations:

1. The quality of growth in the vegetable kingdom.
2. The quality of sensing (sensibility) the animal kingdom.
3. The quality of reasoning and speech that humans possess.
4. Finally, the receivers of the bliss from the sacred (*al-quds*) world given to Prophets.

"All creations are subservient to the rank of the Prophets" (Sijistani, 1966, 17). Hence, "human affairs are stabilized through the wisdom (management) of the messengers" (Sijistani, 1966, 18).

PROPHETS	HUMANS	ANIMALS
- Intellect - Spiritual Support - Innate Knowledge - Mercy - Justice (spiritual & social) - Bravery - Compassion	- Speech - Intelligence	- Growth - Senses (Instinct, motion, and self-preservation)

Spiritual Justice is central to Prophecy because it entitles everyone, irrespective of social class, faith affinity, and sexuality to receive barakah from the Prophet. Prophets embody spiritual and social justice because they practise a universal cosmopolitan ethic in which people are not discriminated based on their beliefs or creative power of self-expression.

Nuṭq (speech) is not merely the act of speaking that gives humans a superior position; nuṭq involves articulation, expression, and creativity. It recognizes in humans the courage to differ, speak truth to power, compose poetry and music, tell stories, and discover that which is hidden from the eyes, indiscernible to the mind and yet open to the possibilities of experiencing the

sublime and unseen. It is such an ability to transcend that gives humans a higher position in creation.

Describing the process of creation, Sijistani states that the First Intellect is the First Creation. The First Creation is perfect and all encompassing. The First Creation became the First Cause endowed with the treasures of highest characteristics from the Word (*kalimah*) of origination. The qualities bestowed upon al-Sābiq (the First) are in abundance and are infinite. The First Intellect desired to discover its own origin and created the motion that resulted in the effusion of the Universal Soul (*al-Tālī*). Al-Sābiq then offered part of his qualities to al-Tālī. The Sābiq did not bestow all that it had received from the Origination when it came into existence upon al-Tālī. While the Intellect (*al-Sābiq*) causes everything else to come into existence, it is directly responsible for the creation of the Universal Soul. The Universal Soul underwent a similar spiritual crisis. Al-Tālī bestowed a small portion of what she had received from al-Sābiq on what followed or emanated from her, i.e. the celestial world; from the celestial world, a little was shared with humanity. When al-Sābiq entrusted a portion at the time of effusion to al-Tālī, that activity made it possible for the Tālī to imagine the physical world to come into existence from chaos, and it became attached to the Tālī as an appendix.

The physical world's association with the spiritual world caused the composition of the human form. Hence, human beings inherit both the physical and the spiritual components. Since the yearning (*shawq*) of the soul toward the intellect is eternal, it takes the form of two worlds. It is characterized by its eternal yearning to be one with whom it is connected. When the Sābiq bestowed its desire upon the Tālī, it makes the Tālī progress from [being] the created to [becoming] a creator. The created is matter and the physical world.

The idea of yearning (*shawq*) became the central theme in devotional Sufi Tariqahs. Among Sufis, the term *'ishq* (love) was used extensively to describe the personal devotion and commitment to the goal of achieving union with Allah. For Sufis, it was love that caused the universe to come into existence. It thrives and regenerates through love. The purpose or object of this love is *ma'arifah,* the esoteric or intimate knowledge of the divine. Hence, they brought these two principles of creation together. Mystics often refer to the Prophet's spiritual sayings about rational mysticism. For example, Allah said, through Prophet Muhammad, "I was a hidden treasure; I loved to be known, so I created the creation" (Ibn al Arabi, 2004).

The Universal Soul's desire to discover its creator compelled it to seek the First Intellect (*al-Sābiq*) and reach the status of the Active Intellect. This motion created the physical universe. Hence, the entire cosmos, including the physical universe inherited this urge to return to their origin. However, entities in the physical world accumulated density and pollutants and are unable to return to their origin by themselves. They do not have the knowledge and requisite purity of the intellect. Therefore, it becomes imperative to have guidance and education to achieve the required qualities to ascend to their spiritual status *(Ithbāt,* 1966).

In the physical world, as Nāṭiq, the Messenger (*Rasūl*) mirrors the Universal Intellect. He has the purity and maturity of the intellect and spiritual support to guide souls to their origin. The Nāṭiq completes human affairs through the support of the Universal Soul. Hence, Prophets are sent to the physical world as manifestations of the Divine Will. They appear to complete the mandate of the Universal Soul, which is to bring human souls to maturation. The Prophet is the completion of her power as the essence of existence through the following ways:

1. Firstly, it is necessary to have Messengers who make human beings conscious of the

diversity in creation due to the power exerted by the Universal Soul on material objects.

2. Secondly, by making the human intellect deserving of the title of intelligence in perceiving the diversity in existence (things).
3. Thirdly, by making the soul comprehend the logic behind the diversity of objects as accurately as possible.
4. Fourthly, by relating to the narrative of the living Nāṭiq, who comes from the Universal Soul to the physical world.
5. Fifthly, by making people, who do not have any such powers, cognizant of the special powers of Messengers
6. Finally, by her manifestation in the living Nāṭiq, the Universal Soul also imprints some of her characteristics on partial souls (human souls) (1966, 20).

There is diversity amongst human souls due to types of pollutants and diverse temperaments; the soul that exceeds by far in accepting the *ifāḍah (*effusion) and *āthār* (imprint) from the Tālī, becomes chosen and distinguished, hence, a Prophet. Further, there are two reasons why some souls do not accept the divine traces:

1. Due to the complexity of opposites within human beings. Having the human form that is highest form in creation has its challenges and often human beings fail to recognize their higher status in creation and do not understand the meaning of the complexities of life.
2. A person's inability to accept those traces on his or her heart. It is impossible for anyone to (receive it) except by listening to the words of the Messenger.

When Allah selected the Messenger, through the angel (*al-ruḥ al-Amīn),* knowledge of the spiritual world is

imprinted on his soul. Hence, the Prophet acquires the ability to guide people on their spiritual journey and navigate through the difficulties of the material world.

Nobility of Prophets

Sijistani offers several arguments regarding Prophets' unique leadership qualities. His primary argument is based on the diversity in creation and the hierarchy that results thereof. He views all created things, animals, and humans, as having innate qualities that distinguish each entity or object from others. The qualitative differences amongst creation results in placing them at particular levels within the hierarchy of created things.

He offers a rubric of characteristics that distinguishes each category of creation from the other. All created objects, animals, and human beings differ in sizes, shapes, composition, and intelligence. He terms these categories as nobility (*al-faḍal*) and superiority (*al-sharaf*). These innate qualities determine one's relative place in the hierarchy of creation. All creations produced in the world, whether minerals, vegetation, animals, or humans, receive spiritual support. Likewise, each has similarities as well as differences.

All creations have an unchangeable substance in their innermost essence, but they also have common physical characteristics. However, each genus (set) is separated by a differentia from its subset. Qualities that are found in the mineral kingdom are found in the vegetable realm but the mineral kingdom lacks the quality of nourishment or growth that is the differentia that makes vegetable kingdom superior to the mineral world. The vegetable kingdom is differentiated from the animal kingdom due to the lack of quality of life. Humans are differentiated from other creation primarily due to the quality of speech (*nuṭq*). The genus (the set) includes all the qualities of its subsets. Hence, humanity encompasses all qualities that are found in

the animal, vegetable, and mineral kingdoms. It means that essential substantive qualities are found in all humans.

Human beings are distinguished from the rest of created things due to their qualities of "speech (*nuṭq*), decision-making, judgment, discretion, (*al-tamīz*), cognition (*al-fikr*), thinking (*khātir*). A human being has a higher status and superiority over animals because animals do not have these qualities. These qualities gave humans power over animals" (Sijistani, 1966, 14). Material objects are between potentiality (*quwwah*) and actuality (*fa'al*). One that is in potentiality becomes actuality through the object that is in actuality.

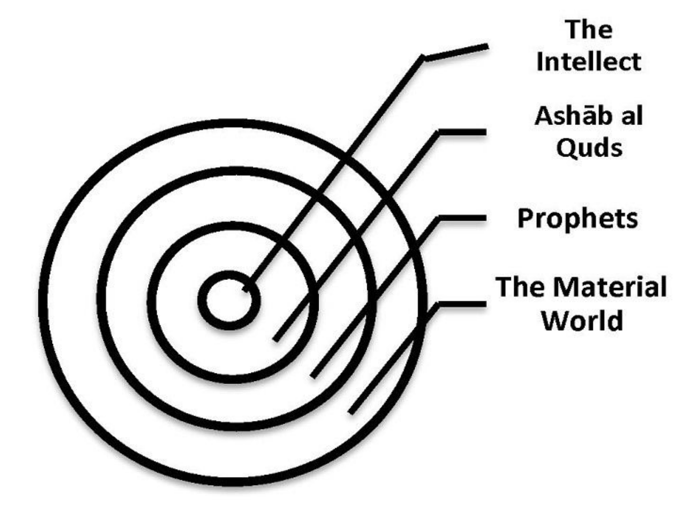
Sijistani uses the example of water and fire. Water is in potentiality, but when it is heated, fire turns water into actuality. Similarly, all lower species are actualized by being absorbed by a higher species. Other examples used are the consumption of vegetables by animals, and animals by humans as food (Sijistani, 1966, 43).

Among humans also, there are differences, such as differences of piety, patience (*al-ḥalīm*), innocence (*al-ṣafīyah)* justice (*al-'ādil*), and despotism as well as the difference between being learned and illiterate. There are also variations with respect to their senses; some have stronger senses than others.

Sijistani notes that among the human species, there is another genus of people. This is the category of specially gifted human beings who share all their qualities with humans but are differentiated by an additional quality of the sacred, 'the holy.' They are called the helpers (*mu'yid*). Prophets occupy a superior and noble status by virtue of special powers given to them by the Holy Spirit (*al-Ruḥ al-Quds*). Just as each realm of existence has unique characteristics that distinguish it from the other realms, Prophets are different from other human beings, and comprise their own unique category

Though Prophets share characteristics with other human beings, they possess some unique and extraordinary characteristics that make them qualitatively and distinctively superior to human beings.

Sijistani envisions a schema in which the innermost circle symbolizes the Universal intellect; the next is the circle of holy wherein the people of Holiness reside, assisted by the Intellect. They are in close proximity to the Intellect and they are few in number. They are the noblest and highest ranking within existence and the noblest amongst the creation. The largest circle is that of matter, perceived through the senses but furthest from the Intellect. There are four stages between the Nāṭiq and the *Quds*. Between these two, a process occurs by which one can pass



from one stage to another progressive stage of growth and sensory development.

The Nāṭiq is *ta'yīd* in potentiality and becomes the *ta'yīd* in actuality when he benefits from the one who is the helper (*al-mu'yid*) in actuality. "A similar sequence exists between the companions of the sacred (*aṣḥāb al-Quds*)" (Sijistani, 1966, 43).

Everyone at a lower stage can perceive one stage above them. Those who are in a labyrinth are at the rank of the world and can perceive those who are at a higher rank. Hence, the *lawāḥiq* (helpers) can perceive the rank of the Perfect (*al-tāmm*); and the Perfects can perceive the rank of the fundaments (*al-asāsiyah*). "The *Nāṭiqiyah* (The Speakers) informed people about the progress of Muhammad from the rank of Imam to the Nāṭiq. The Quran (17:1) says, "Praise the Lord, who lifted his servant by night from Masjid al-Ḥaram to Masjid al-Aqṣā" (Sijistani, 1966, 44). In this verse, Masjid al-Ḥaram and Masjid al-Aqṣā are symbols of the progress that Prophet Muhammad made from one spiritual rank to another higher spiritual rank. When the Tālī intended to manifest the exaltedness of the Originator (*al-Mubdaʻ*), it manifested the attributes of creation to his servants in the physical world. Muhammad was raised from the *ḥadd* of the secretive Imam to the manifested *ḥadd* of the Nāṭiq. It bestowed upon him spiritual signs that are largely concealed from the community.

There is a difference between progress when it occurs between the Nāṭiq and al-Quds. In this case, one does not perceive the other's rank while receiving *ta'yīd*, but the one is transformed into the other in the process. "It is true that the first messenger from the Creator, who was the first creation, was the Intellect" (Sijistani, 1966, 49). The Universal Soul receives benefits from the Intellect through its two potentialities, al-nuṭq (speech or expression) and al-Quds (The Holiness). Al-nuṭq signifies the movement of its urge (*shawq*) and *al-Quds* denotes stillness (*al-sukūn*) (Sijistani, 1966, 44). Al-Quds, the holiest of the holy, is an innate prophetic quality that raises a Prophet's rank but also connects him with the world of intelligence as well as the physical world. "Because of the Prophets' distinct quality of holiness (*al-quds*), their relation with the physical world and human beings is more like an accident

than an integrative part of that category" (Sijistani, 1966, 23).

The central edict of the Prophetic message is the command to do good and abstain from the immoral, the latter being the cause of the lower life of the self. Sijistani applies such religio-ethical edicts to connect his Ismaili Neoplatonic philosophy with the broader framework of Islamic ethics. The intellect instructs us to do the best and avoid the wicked and ugly. The human intellect has innate knowledge that is awakened when it encounters Prophetic knowledge.

When the Rasūl conveyed his message to human beings, it resonated with the human intellect's prior knowledge that was dormant. Hence, the intellect within us is potential and the message conveyed to us is active. One can surmise that the Prophet's message transforms the human intellect in ways that are similar to the schema illustrated above, where the rank above activates the rank below. This makes permissions and prohibitions obligatory upon those who have sound intellects, but withheld (permissions and prohibitions) from persons with unsound intellects.

When a person of sound intellect practises that which is obligatory, it results in harmony and balance in the temperament and intellect, and enables the intellect to receive the full effect from the wise messenger of his or her time. The Prophet's intellect becomes the spiritual messenger for the person. When a physical messenger is sent, the individual accepts the message from two messengers, the physical, and the spiritual and thus the person achieves fulfillment. It remains obligatory upon him/her to follow the physical Sharī'ah that the messenger in a physical body conveyed.

Hence, the inner or intellectual knowledge of spiritual truths comes face to face via the innate intellect (*al-'aql al-'azīzī*) in a person. In the metaphysical context, the one who is the first messenger from the Creator establishes the

rules of permissions and prohibitions, and the physical messenger is the last messenger (in the chain).

Sijistani parallels the analogy of the messenger to food that gives the vigor of life to inner organs with the analogy of the human intellect to inner organs that receive life from the food. “The Physical Messengers are the Masters (Leaders) of the cycles (*aṣḥāb al-adwār*) who brought to us the message of the Creator in language only. It is obligatory upon humankind to accept that message just as all creation accepted the message of the first messenger” (Sijistani, 1966, 50). Hence, there is a correspondence between the first and the last messengers; both are in agreement with each other, which means that the message that the physical messenger brought is in conformity with the intent of the First Intellect (Sijistani, 1966, 50).

As there are differences amongst human beings, similarly there are differences amongst Prophets. One excels over the other. There are many reasons for differences among the Messengers.

Sijistani states that the ranking of Messengers depends on the power they receive from the Holy and their proximity to It. They are bestowed with leadership and authority over people. Since “the rest of humankind do not possess that special power, they are weak (spiritually) and unable to receive it and became totally subservient to their (Prophets’) rules and their administration (*siyāsah*) creating the dichotomies of higher and lower, active and passive” (Sijistani, 1966, 15). In this respect, “the higher is active (giver) and the lower is the recipient, such as the soul is higher and active and the body is lower and recipient” (Sijistani, 1966, 16).

Sijistani highlights the importance of accepting the Prophet whose message is current, and not that of the previous Prophet, whose message has become redundant due to the arrival of the new Prophet. Accepting the current message is important for spiritual progress. Hence, accepting the messenger of the current cycle ensures

spiritual progress for the believer and moving up from one rank (*ḥadd*) to the next becomes possible. The rank of the believer who reached the limit (*al-ḥadd*) of Abraham, believes in him, accepts his invitation (*da'wah*), and does not move to the limit of Moses remains between Abraham and Moses. Likewise, the one who stopped at the *ḥadd* of Moses, believes in him and accepts his invitation but does not accept the message of Jesus does not progress spiritually beyond that limit. The person, who stopped at the *ḥadd* of Jesus, believes in him, accepts his invitation, does not progress to the rank of Muhammad. Hence, the persons who do not move beyond the limits of past prophets miss the opportunity to benefit from the message of Prophet Muhammad.

The intention of believers is to achieve the knowledge of *ma'arifah*. The truth of the Messengers is concealed beneath their Sharī'ah, but they are not contradictory. Hence, there is no difference in the truth of the Messengers; they only differ in their writing down (text). The meaning of the text is concealed in the words. He said, "There is no difference between His messengers (Quran, 2:285) and among his appointed *abwāb,* they are enveloped in wisdom" (Sijistani, 1966, 43).

The Primary Role of Muhammad

Sijistani lays down the key functions of Prophet Muhammad in his book *Ithbāt al-Nubuwwah*. According to him, Muhammad is Allah's "servant (*'abd*) and messenger (*Rasūl*) who was given the light of *al-ta'yīd* (assistance)" (1966, 5). For Sijistani, Muhammad's status as the servant (*'abd*) and Rasūl (messenger) are unique positions given exclusively to him. The idea of *'abd* is not any ordinary status. It is a special status granted to him by Allah. Hence, being *'abd*, does not bring him at par with ordinary human beings. *'Abd* is the status of proximity to Allah. It is the closest relationship one could have with Allah. Muhammad received this status of *'abd* by totally

submitting to the will of Allah. This status also indicates the *ma'arifah* of the Divine Essence. As the closest and chosen servant, he gained the most intimate knowledge of the Divine.

Muhammad as the *'abd* lays down three principles of the sufi tariqah (mystical path), Love, submission, and *ma'arifah*. For a Sufi, submission to Allah comes from love through which a person can achieve *ma'arifah.* Hence, Muhammad achieved the status of a perfect mystic, *al-Insān al-Kāmil,* by being engrossed in divine love, submitting completely and achieving the innermost knowledge of the divine.

The Prophet had an additional role as the messenger (*Rasūl*) of Allah. He received the light (*nūr*) of *ta'yīd*. *Ta'yīd* is the knowledge and wisdom that the messenger received from the First Intellect. However, the Prophet's message is not a verbal communication alone. This message, according to Sijistani, is to remind believers of the remembrance (*dhikr*) of Allah, spiritual renewal, and to convey Allah's blessing (*barakāt*) (Sijistani, 1966).

Sijistani empathetically describes the spiritual functions of the Prophet, grounding his statements on the Holy Quran (2:257 and 16:125). He states, "He brings them from darkness to light. He assists dead souls in their revival through wisdom and good advice" (Sijistani, 1966). Furthermore, the function of the Prophet is to lead his community with the best policies and to educate them about the message he brings to them. According to Sijistani, "He is the leader of all creatures and the seal of the Prophets and messengers."

The Human Response to the Prophetic Message

Sijistani discusses the human response to the Prophetic message. According to him, Prophethood has two aspects, one is intellectual, and the second is sensory or physical. A Prophet as a human being has a physical existence like any other human. He acts and lives his life like a human. This

similarity of presence and function makes people misjudge the status of the prophet.

Hence, those who denied the Prophetic mission assumed that the Prophet is like any other human being and his presence belongs to sensory world. They were unable to recognize the intellectual and spiritual aspects of the Prophet. The latter aspects belong to the non-physical and non-sensory realm. Their knowledge of the Prophet was limited to their sensory experiences of him. Hence, their denial of the Prophet was based on the assumption that the Prophet was an ordinary person like them. They found characteristics common between themselves and the Prophets, such as humanness, the use of senses, and performance of everyday activities but were unaware about the nobility that the messenger had over them, with respect to being a member of subtle intelligences.

The Holy Quran has a powerful verse describing the conditions that existed during the mission of the Prophet. The verse says, "And they say: 'What sort of a messenger is this, who eats food, and walks through the streets? Why has not an angel been sent down to him to give admonition with him?" (Al-Quran, 25:7). As the Quran indicates, they judged the Prophet from his routine social and physical activities and denied his Prophetic nobility and mission. The lack of insight into the esoteric or Prophetic side of Muhammad put these people in the category of humans who have not reached the intellectual and spiritual stage where they could be cognizant of the inner dimension of prophecy.

The second group of people who did not accept Prophecy consisted of those who said that the Prophet's claim was not true and was a conspiracy to make him an authority over them. They also feared that the rules, do's, and don'ts, that the Prophet promulgated were made to take away their freedoms (Sijistani, 1966, 5). They felt that these obligations and rules would give Muhammad control

and power over them, and therefore, they refused to accept his Prophethood.

The third group who did not accept the Prophet believed that Prophecy could be acquired through effort and education. They assumed that they had reached the stage of knowledge and wisdom where Prophethood could be acquired and they were close to achieving knowledge that the Prophet had acquired. They compared Prophethood to a position in government that could be acquired through effort, education, or knowledge. They totally missed the opportunity to understand the status and bliss of Prophethood, which is not acquired but given.

Sijistani also describes the categories of believers, including several sub-categories that place believers at different levels of knowing and experiencing Prophecy. Sijistani describes levels of believers within the faith community, who accepted the Prophet and his message with varying degrees of commitment, knowledge, and spiritual affinity.

1. Those who accepted Prophethood based on hearing traditions and reports about the appearance of the Prophet that came down to them from their ancestors. They did not attain the truth of prophecy.
2. Those who are people of imitation (*taqlīd*). They follow religion because others are doing the same things. They also fail to discover the truth of the *Nubuwwah*.
3. Those who are the people of the Truth (*ahl-al-ḥaqā'iq*), who accept the faith from the progeny of the Prophet and his successor and give the truth its due place where Allah has meant it to be (Sijistani, 1966, 6).

It includes people who knew the Prophecy of the Messenger through the knowledge of the Truth (*al-'ulūm al-ḥaqīqah*) (1966*,* 6). According to Sijistani, people

receive bliss from the Prophetic light (*al-nūr al-nabawī*) according to the intellectual and spiritual level of each person. For Sijistani, a wise person is the one who practises religion in its entirety. He refers to the Quranic verse (3:103) "Hold fast to the rope of Allah and do not be divided." He suggests that such a person holds on to the strong rope (*al-'urwah al-wuthqā*), when s/he is devout to the Messenger – a Muslim by Sharī'ah, and a Mu'min with *ta'wīl*.

Sijistani is of the opinion that people who accept *ta'wīl* must continue to practice Sharī'ah. Such people are prepared to receive the full message based on their sound, inner dispositions. A person fully accepts the messenger because s/he embraces both aspects of the message of the Prophet – the *ẓāhir (*exoteric) and the *bāṭin* (esoteric); such a person is prepared to receive the Prophet's spiritual imprints on his intellect. These spiritual imprints (*āthār*) are a combination of diverse spiritual experiences, which could be in the form of knowledge, enlightenment, tenderness (humility) or greater consciousness, greater and/or a qualitatively different sense of love than the normal, human experience of love. After being true to the Prophetic message and practice of the religion, the person is able to reap the fruit of her/his hard labor and devotion. In a powerful allegorical statement, Sijistani states that "the time comes for him to reap his harvest, which are beyond description and too delicate for the mind to comprehend" (1966, 52). He is alluding to the spiritual rewards of having knowledge and spiritual openness to experience the most rewarding vision.

Sijistani also warns that those who follow their reason and forsake the Prophet's message are condemned *(*1966*,* 53). He believes that the use of intellect without faith in the messenger is harmful. He also believes that it is harmful to use *ta'wīl* without the practice of Sharī'ah (1966*,* 53). In other words, intellect and the spirit are conjoined twins and one without the other has potential to

harm. For him, the intellect without grounding in spirituality, and spiritual practices without the protection of exoteric religion are dangerous.

Characteristics of the Prophet's Leadership

Sijistani's views on leadership rotate around the idea of power. For him, there are two sources of power, "natural (*ṭabi'ī*) and intentional (*irādī*)" (1966, 38). These two forms of powers play an important role in placing creation in hierarchies and creating hierarchy and social status in society.

Natural power is the innate ability in an object that gives it superiority or power over others. This power is only possible when something is in relation to something subordinate, such as the power of vegetation over minerals by virtue of having the quality of growth in vegetation. Similarly, humans dominate animals and vegetation by virtue of their ability to speak. These are natural powers. Intentional (*irādī)* power is like the domination of a man or a woman over a group of the same species, such as the Messenger having power over a great number of human beings by virtue of the holiness or sacred in him.

Again, Sijistani attempts to establish the leadership of the Prophet by arguing that the distribution of power creates hierarchies within creation, and that the Prophet is at the apex of that hierarchy. His thesis is similar to Abu Hatim's argument when discussing the superiority of Prophets and comparing them with rulers and politicians. Sijistani believed that the Prophet excelled in managing human and public affairs.

According to Sijistani, kings and rulers have different policies for different classes of people and they treat people from different social classes differently. Hence, like Abu Hatim, Sijistani also places emphasis on the notion of justice that the Prophet practised. He states, "The policies and customs of the Messenger are same for all human beings whether meek or powerful. Hence, justice as a

primary ideal in society and social justice as a key policy issue is an important part of the faith and doctrine of Islam" (1966, 38).

Sijistani goes even further than Abu Hatim did. He notes that Prophets were able to bring forth ideas and complete policies because of their spiritual strength; hence, he draws an intrinsic link between spiritual matters and worldly affairs. In other words: "The policies of the Rasūl are ideal and complete because of the power that they receive from the spiritual world" (Sijistani, 1966, 39). He adds an additional caveat to such power and policies by stating that the Prophet's "policies (*siyāsah*) are like medicine which remedy all ailments. These are useful for all times and all maladies" (1966, 39).

The reasons that give messengers superiority include divine grace (*ta'yīd*), and their level of intellectual maturity. The messengers (pl. *rusūl*) are the noblest of human beings. Sijistani suggests that the rarity of Messengers is such that there might be one messenger in a millennium. They are not present in the world at all times. They manifest themselves with a significant interval of time between two messengers.

These messengers have several characteristics in common. Sijistani proceeds to explain the seven qualities found in Prophets and particularly, in Prophet Muhammad who sets the standard of quality. In other words, Prophet Muhammad excelled in being the role model for humanity. Sijistani discusses seven such characteristics:

1. Knowledge (*'ilm*): Prophets examined the world and abstained from it after obtaining knowledge of its reality. The Messenger tested the world, practised piety while in the world, and abstained from it after acquiring knowledge of its transitory nature.
2. Justice (*al-'adl*): Prophets established standards for justice. Once the Prophet gave rules for a just society, people understood the

meaning and value of it and established it through law.

3. Forgiveness (*al-‘afawa*): The Prophet forgave people who did harm to him.
4. Generosity (*al-jawd*): The Messengers apply generosity fully. They (Prophets) are generous with what they received from the *nūr* (light) of Allah. They overcame worldly difficulties and did not worry about destruction or annihilation occurring in the transitory world.
5. Bravery (*al-shujah*): No one used bravery as extensively as the Prophet. He had no fear with respect to matters of Allah. The bravery of the Messenger has an entirely spiritual basis. It is not similar to the natural bravery.
6. Mercy (*al-raḥmah*): The Messengers are given abundance of mercy. When or whatever calamities and difficulties befall upon them in establishing the da‘wah, they remain merciful.
7. Truthfulness (*al-ṣidq*): The da‘wah of the messengers is based on truthfulness. The ideas and message they stand for are validated through their truthfulness. Their struggle was to ascertain the purpose of their mission to guide the soul and that purpose was achieved through their truthfulness.

Although some humans may have some of the qualities that prophets possess, their quality remains imperfect. Sijistani states,

> These qualities in Messengers are absolute whereas humans have a residue of the qualities. An example of this is that knowledge of the Messenger Muhammad (blessings of God upon him and his progeny) is complete; compared to his knowledge, the entire community’s knowledge even today is a small part.

Sijistani supports his argument by referring to verses of Quran: “The Prophet said, “I do not speak through my desires” (53:3). I only give what is revealed to me” (53:4) and “His knowledge is extremely powerful” (53:5), and concerning knowledge “the community is not given but little of his knowledge” (17:85).

The Quran validates the notion that the source of the Prophet’s knowledge is divine and that he shared a fraction of such knowledge with the community. The community is dependent on the Prophet to receive the knowledge; otherwise, they would not have access to in-depth spiritual knowledge and insight into worldly affairs.



Chapter 6

Nubuwwah in Persian Ismaili Traditions

Persian Ismaili literature reflects unique styles and perspectives on *Nubuwwah*. Herein, the notion of *ta'wīl* and the teachings of successive Imams strongly connect with representations of the Prophet. Two major thinkers in this period, Nasir Khusraw (d. 451/1060) and Nasir al-Din al Tusi (d. 672/1274), undertook in-depth studies into the potential and possibilities of *ta'wīl* in extracting the meaning of the Quran and the teachings of Prophet Muhammad and Imams. For these scholars, *ta'wīl* was a spiritual exercise that sharpened the intellect and rejuvenated their souls.

The common threads in their interpretation of the role of the Prophet that they share with their predecessors are the hierarchy within creation and fundamental ways in which created things and persons differ from each other. Each class of created objects and living creatures has innate qualities that make it qualitatively different from the other classes. Human beings are the most distinguished among all classes of creations. However, the epitome of the hierarchy in creation is the Prophet. Prophets are superior to any other creation because they have pure and actualized intellects and they receive bliss (benedictions)

from the celestial world. Prophet Muhammad is the highest within the hierarchy of Prophets. He is the last Prophet and he perfected the religion of Islam, which encompassed all earlier messages from Allah.

The Iranian Period of Ismaili thought draws significant elements from the preceding Fatimid intellectual tradition. Ismaili writers of the Iranian period lived under difficult circumstances and often under duress. Nasir Khusraw, for instance, lived in a hostile environment. He was attacked by a mob in his house, and was able to make a dramatic escape to the mountainous region of Badakhshan and spend the rest of his life in the remote area of Yamgan (Halm, 2001).

Nasir al-Din Tusi's life went through the turmoil of the Mongol attack and the destruction of the Alamut fortress. Subsequently, he spent a significant portion of his life serving the Mongol emperor (Hunsberger, 2000). He survived the conquest thanks to his knowledge of astronomy and mathematics that intrigued the Mongol emperor.

As a minority community, the Iranian Ismaili intellectuals were constantly forced to justify their beliefs, especially the concept of *Imāmah* and demonstrate its link with the concept of *Nubuwwah.* Hence, these two concepts are often discussed together. The interdependence of these two concepts created a system of interconnected ideas that weaves a web of spiritual and philosophical ideas often bringing forth unique perspectives on religious beliefs and concepts.

The pedagogy of the da'wah that consisted of knowledge (*'ilm*) and its transmission (*tā'līm*) was a major preoccupation for Ismaili writers. The discourse of knowledge managed spiritual and mundane aspects of human life, especially the lives of believers who had committed themselves to search the truth. To them, all forms of knowledge contribute to a person's emotional, intellectual, and spiritual well-being (Talbani, 1996).

For prominent theologians among the *ahl al-Sunnah*, such as Muhammad al-Ghazali (d. 505/1111) and Abu al-Hasan Uthman al-Hujwiri (d. 470/1077), religious knowledge preceded all other forms of knowledge. Other forms of knowledge were auxiliary and were acquired only if they were necessary to support the routines of a daily life (Talbani, 1996). Al-Ghazali established the taxonomy of knowledge into three categories. He considered religious knowledge as the favorable (*Maḥmūd*) mode that Muslims should acquire. Medicine and mathematics were acceptable modes of knowledge since they benefitted humankind in their daily life. Muslim should acquire these but not exceed their need. Philosophy, music, and astronomy were considered undesirable (*madhmūm*) modes of knowledge. Hence, Muslims should abstain from acquiring knowledge of these disciplines (Talbani, 1996).

Whilst Persian Ismailis were open to all forms of knowledge, they were passionate about Quranic and Prophetic knowledge. They considered the Holy Quran, the Traditions of the Prophet and the Imams to comprise core knowledge, essential for the elevation of the human intellect and soul. However, other disciplines of inquiry were also important for the evolution of individuals and society. Since the Quran urges human beings to explore the universe, contemplate creation, and search for Allah's signs within and around, they concluded that there is no contradiction between science and faith.

Nasir Khusraw and the House of Wisdom

Nasir Khusraw ascribes the noble status of Prophet Muhammad as unparalleled and considers the knowledge and wisdom that he brought as supreme. He affirms that the Prophet is wisest among people and he is the last Prophet among Prophets who gave humanity the treasure of wisdom and the mine of all knowledge through the holy Quran (Khusraw, 2012, 11).

In the book *The Convergence of the Two Wisdoms (Kitāb Jāmi‘ al-Ḥikmatayn,* Nasir Khusraw compares and contrasts two distinct forms of knowledge, i.e., religious and philosophical knowledge. In introducing his book, he explains that he researched the Quran, hadith, and writings of various philosophers. He considers Prophetic knowledge and the experience of learning to be exhilarating. “The reason for this is that the treasure-house of wisdom is the heart and soul of the one who is the Seal of the Prophets and a trace of the perfume of wisdom is inside the books of the ancients as well” (Khusraw, 1953,18; cited by Hunsberger, n.d.).

In contrasting Prophetic and philosophical forms of knowledge, Nasir Khusraw labels Prophetic knowledge as “the treasure-house of wisdom” and philosophical knowledge as having “a trace of the perfume of wisdom.” His use of the terms “treasure-house” and “a trace” definitely demonstrate where he placed his emphasis and value. He also uses prominent Shiite terminology of “house” alluding to the belief that the “treasure of wisdom” is in the house of the Prophet and his progeny, the Imams, who succeed one after the other.

Nasir Khusraw sees interconnectedness in all forms of knowledge. In creating taxonomy of knowledge, he visualizes the knowledge discourse as connecting the visible world of matter to the invisible world of spirit. For him, there is a correspondence between the metaphysical and physical universe, the physical world, and human existence. A similar connection also exists between the universal intellect and the human intellect. Knowledge plays a central role in connecting imperfect human intellect/soul with the Universal Soul. He states,

> The soul’s perfection occurs through knowledge by way of this tremendous construction (i.e., the world). For a human being to move from deficiency to perfection, he clearly must arrive at a stage at which a connection with Universal

> Intellect in its entirety takes place (Khusraw, 2012, 115).

The connection with the Universal Soul occurs through the mediation of the Prophets. The six prominent Prophets, Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, Jesus, and Muhammad performed this responsibility (2012, 115).

In his reflections, the interconnectedness of the human soul with the Universal soul/intellect is not symbolic or philosophical speculation; it is real since the Universal intellect as the light and wisdom perpetually guides human beings to their destiny. Those who are initiated on the path are more cognizant of the link and have the ardent desire (*mā'il*) to shorten this link and get closer to the universal intellect. Such interconnectedness purports a person to free herself/himself from the snares of material conditions. These veils of ignorance conceal the Truth from human beings.

The discourse of knowledge in society restrains people from rising above their limitations. Nasir Khusraw cites a hadith of the Prophet that says, "Every tree which is not planted by us is destined for the fire." Nasir Khusraw considers it a metaphor for the whole creation; "the wise understand by this hadith that trees which are planted in the garden of the religion of the ignorant are the ones the Prophet condemns to burn in the fire" (1953, 288; *cf.* Hunsberger, n.d). Numerous agencies with diverse agendas produce knowledge in society; whether it is mundane or religious/spiritual, it can captivate the human mind, imagination, and emotions.

Yet, what knowledge is worthwhile? What knowledge has long lasting value to benefit the human intellect and liberate the human soul from its existential conditioning and restraints? For Khusraw, liberation comes through knowledge that is from the Prophet and his Progeny.

According to Nasir Khusraw, the human intellect is in potential; sensual pleasures in the world entrap it, and human circumstances prevent individuals from discovering

the path and reaching the truth. A person's indulgence in sensory pleasures makes his/her soul dense and this material density blocks the divine light from entering into his/her soul. Hence, the soul does not receive nourishment that could enable its growth, to transcend its base condition and become actualized.

In these conditions, the human soul needs a person whose soul is actualized, who is the conduit to receiving bliss (*ta'yīd*) from the celestial world such as the Prophet and the Imams. He notes that people who possess actual intellect are *ahl al-ta'yīd,* the divinely assisted people who are the Prophet and the legitimate Imams from his progeny (Khusraw, 1923, 346; 1940, 27; Peerwani, 2011).

According to Khusraw, people do not have direct access to intellectual/spiritual knowledge (*ma'arifah*). It is not possible for an individual to take the journey on the path alone. S/he needs a guide who knows that path and whose intellect is fully actualized. He refers to the Quranic verse, "O flocks of jinn and humans, if you have ability to escape from the limits of sky and earth, then escape! You will never escape except with the help of the *ḥujjah*" (Quran: 55:33).

Nasir Khusraw translates *sultan* or clear authority as *ḥujjah*" (Peerwani, 2011, n.p.). His understanding is that the sultan is the Prophet, Imam or one of their designee. Hence, escape from worldly limitations is possible only through the help of the spiritual guide.

Cosmic Hierarchy

Nasir Khusraw, like other Ismaili writers, reaffirms the hierarchy in celestial and terrestrial realms. He follows the same schematics of *ḥudūd* who perform their spiritual and intellectual duties in relation to upper and lower *ḥudūd.* The complementary binaries of upper and lower are also designated in Ismaili literature as male and female principles. Establishing such correlations signifies the distribution of power and knowledge, and at an esoteric

level, spiritual status. Explaining spiritual and corporate binaries in the spiritual realm and worldly organization, Nasir Khusraw (2012, 145) states,

> Religion, which is one in its root has two branches, each of these is also a branch with regard to what is above it but root to that which is below. Thus, the Prophet is a branch in relation to it (i.e. religion) but a root to his designated *waṣī* (Legatee). The waṣī is a branch in relation to the Prophet but a root with respect to the Imam. The Imam is a branch in relation to the waṣī but a root for the *ḥujjat*.

Describing the organization of the da'wah, he suggests that the person at the upper level or higher in the hierarchy is the source of nutrition like a root, whereby branches grow and receive nourishment. Similarly, in the da'wah organization the Prophet is the root that gives nourishment to the *Waṣī*, and assists him in intellectual and spiritual growth by bestowing knowledge and bliss upon him. The *Waṣī* plays a similar role for the Imam, and the Imam for succeeding members of the hierarchy. Hence, members of the hierarchy progress spiritually and intellectually and they transmit the same knowledge and spiritual bliss to members of the community, each according to one's spiritual status, and station on the path.

A corresponding relation exists among the members of the celestial hierarchy. This relation is twofold, one, their binary relation with the members of celestial hierarchy, in which they transmit spiritual and intellectual benefits from upper to lower levels and their corresponding relation with the members in the terrestrial hierarchy. Nasir Khusraw states,

> Another aspect is that the Intellect, which is equivalent to the Prophet, is a branch with respect to the [Divine] Command but a root-principle for the *waṣī* and for the Soul. The Soul

> is a branch vis-à-vis the Intellect and a root with respect to *Jadd* and to the Imam (Khusraw, 2012, 145).

In the celestial hierarchy, the *Kalimah* (the Word) or primordial Command is the root that bestows knowledge and bliss to the Intellect and the Intellect transmits the knowledge and bliss to succeeding members of the hierarchy. The Prophet is the terrestrial pole that is connected to the Intellect and receives knowledge directly from it. Hence, the cyclical movement towards intellectual and spiritual perfection continues due to the relationship that the Prophet has with the Intellect and he in turns bestows his blessings and transmits his special knowledge to those who are connected with him.

Responsibilities of the Prophet

In *Wajh-e Dīn*, *A Dimension of Religion* (1977), Nasir Khusraw specifically discusses the esoteric dimension (*ta'wīl*) of religion. In the esoteric (*ta'wīl*) context, Nasir Khusraw considers the role of the Prophet (or the universal intellect) as the masculine principle and *Waṣī* (or the Universal soul) as the feminine principle. One gives and the other receives; the sun gives light and moon receives it. These corresponding roles also identify the Prophet as *Nāṭiq* (the speaker) and *Waṣī* as *Ṣāmit* (the Silent one).

This juxtaposition of roles is rotated with succeeding Imams as well. The significant difference is that the Prophet's role as the original message bearer is intact, and with each Imam, the successor is the *Ṣāmit*. The *Ṣāmit* is inactive during the period of the Prophet or Imam. He conveys the teaching of the Prophet and the Imam of the time. He works on their behalf. He actively interprets the religion and leads the faithful on their journey only when he succeeds as the Imam.

There is only one Imam in any period of time, who interprets, engages, and transforms believers. Each Imam

passes on spiritual knowledge and light to his successor and to adepts. Each individual soul receives the light based on the purity of the substance of their soul. Nasir explained the purity of the substance with an analogy to metal. As there are different grades and qualities of metal, the same is true for human souls. The highest quality of metal is gold. Gold has the ability to receive maximum light and only the Prophet's substance could reach to the purity of gold (Khusraw, 1977).

Prophet Muhammad's Status

Nasir Khusraw explains why Muhammad achieved the highest status and why he was chosen to be a Prophet. The Prophet achieved the noblest status because he encompassed the divine light in its entirety. Individuals who are searching for the truth need the assistance of the one who is an actualized intellect, who could assist an individual soul to be actualized, and receive intellectual and spiritual knowledge. Humans are unable to seek or advance on the spiritual path on their own since a soul that is born in the material world is captured by worldly pleasures and circumstances.

The Prophet was able to transcend worldly conditions and attain nobility and the highest status. This nobility is based on the transparency of his nature, which is indicative of purity and the actualization of his intellect and its ability to receive the Light of Allah. This status enabled him to benefit from the light emanating from the Divine Source.

Thus, in the cosmic scheme, "the Prophet is like the Sun and only one soul reaches the status of Prophethood," (Peerwani, 2011). Accordingly, only one soul resides at the level of Prophethood; not all human beings can be prophets and not all elements can be gold. In the world of religion (*'ālam al-dīn*), his Waṣī, (the spiritual heir of the Prophet), allegorically like the moon, assists the Prophet and represents the esoteric and subtle aspects of the Prophetic message (*Sharī'ah,* the path).

The Prophetic message constructs a Sharīʻah, the path that includes all the ingredients required a person to live a balanced life and assist him/her in achieving the final destination. The path and its components are all open to interpretation. Some may define it narrowly as the law, or practice of rituals while others may define Sharīʻah as a comprehensive and broad discipline that covers all aspects of human life including the pursuit of knowledge, art and creative expression as part of mystical discipline, and the application of ethics in everyday life.

Sharīʻah is not merely a system of law or dogma. It can be interpreted as the possibility and opportunity for a human intellect and spirit to explore the limits of the outer universe and her/his own inner cosmos. It allows a person to discover inner and outer worlds and express creativity. In essence, Sharīʻah, as a holistic path, enables an individual to search for the Truth through ʻ*ibādat* (*dhikr* and contemplation), art and other creative expressions, and services to humanity.

The Prophet's Transformative Power

The Prophet's wisdom and inspiration are catalysts for human transformation. Correspondences between different levels of existence play vital roles. They provide a meta-structure to emplace the human in universal history.

The individual becomes a part of the sacred discourse that not only regulates her/his life but that is symbiotically revived through his/her participation and creative contribution. Human passivity is relative and not absolute. Therefore, an individual's active participation in the production, generation, and passing on of knowledge and bliss is essential to complete cosmic history - the journey of the lone soul to its destination. Further, by virtue of being in alignment with the cosmic force, the intellect constantly receives wisdom and light to move forward, take the journey, and is attuned with the spirit and the message of Muhammad.

Nasir Khusraw considers Prophet Muhammad as the intercessor for the Muslim community. The presence of Muhammad in the community means that believers who follow Muhammad are protected. For Nasir Khusraw, the ark of Noah is a symbol of the Prophet and his family. Those who are devoted to the Prophet and his family and engrained in their knowledge are protected and those who do not reside in this ark of Prophet are destroyed by ignorance. Ignorance of the knowledge that Prophet brought is the worst of punishment that deprive human intellect and soul of the nourishing knowledge of the Prophet (Khusraw, 2012, 47).

The Prophet was privileged in having the direct vision of Allah when he ascended to *Mi'rāj*. During his conference with Allah, he was able to obtain the promise that he would intercede on behalf of his community on the Day of Judgment. This promise accorded a unique and most powerful position and status to Muhammad that he achieved due to his obedience to Allah. Hence, Nasir Khusraw recommends that human beings should also practice similar obedience to Allah if they seek Allah's nearness. A person has to be trained in the obedience of the Prophet, for by his unswerving obedience to God the Prophet reached the place where he was only 'two bows length or closer' [53:11] (Schimmel, *Dīvān*, 2001, 89). Nasir suggests that believers follow the Prophet in total obedience being the manner in which the Prophet achieved the status of *'abd*. Furthermore, seekers should explore knowledge in the mine of the Quran. These two are essential conditions to get closer to Allah. Nasir considers the Holy Quran as the major source of inspiration. He states (Schimmel, *Dīvān,* 2001, 59),

I chose the Quran
And the faith of Muhammad
For that's the choice
That Muhammad made

In this statement, Nasir declares that he made the choice of accepting Quran, and thus the faith of Muhammad; by doing so, he followed the example of Muhammad. Muhammad faced adversity when he received the Quran, and he opted to face his adversaries rather than leave the path of the Quran.

Nasir al-Din al-Tusi on the Prophet's Nobility

Nasir al-Din al-Tusi followed his predecessor in explaining the nature, role, and status of the prophecy and Prophet Muhammad. Arguing for the necessity of prophecy, Tusi presents arguments similar to Nasir Khusraw. He states that there is a great deal of diversity in creation. Creation has different grades as well, which suggest that the quality of creation can be ranked in terms of how they express the life force. Hence, minerals are at the lowest rank in creation, then above minerals is vegetation, then animals and above them is human creation.

However, the highest creation is the Prophet. The reason behind the highest status of Prophethood is that it has the ability to receive light to a degree that other levels of creations are unable. Prophets are like the glass that has the ability to receive light and pass it on to others. Individuals, whose souls resemble dense material, have limited ability to absorb light. It depends on their spiritual status, whether they are at the mineral, vegetative, or animal stage (Tusi, 2005, 109).

Interestingly, Tusi does not merely use his staging of creation to indicate a hierarchy of physical ability but also applies it as a metaphor for spiritual ability. Humans need spiritual support and learning to advance from their existing state to move up to higher stages until they build capacity and become eligible to receive the light. Tusi placed Prophets in an entirely different category from the rest of the creation. The difference is as radical as vegetation is from minerals and minerals from animals.

Prophets are in a different category from humans. Since they supersede human beings in spiritual, intellectual, and ethical qualities, they are able to help humans advance on the spiritual path. Prophets bring two distinct responsibilities/ directives (*ḥukm*); one relates to the conduct of worldly matters and the other concerns resurrection and life after death (Tusi, 2005, 140).

The Prophet and His Successor

Tusi follows the prophetic scheme that Ismaili writers propounded before and during the Fatimid period. He also advances the theory that there are cycles of six distinguished Prophets (*ʻaẓam*). Each of them had a *Waṣī* or successor, such as Adam's *Waṣī* was Seth, Noah's *Waṣī* was Sam (Sem), Abraham's *Waṣī* was Malik al-Salam, Moses's *Waṣī* was Aaron, and Jesus's *Waṣī* was Maʻadd, or Simon Pietreus. Muhammad's successor was Ali ibn Abi Talib (Tusi, 2005, 170).

Tusi postulates that the cycles of six Prophets are the six days of creation in which religion was completed; hence, Prophet Muhammad is the last Prophet, known as the "Seal of Prophecy." Tusi interprets the biblical story of creation as a narrative about the evolution and completion of the world of religion (*ʻālam-e dīn*) rather than the creation of the physical world. Each day refers to each Nāṭiq who introduced people to the path (Sharīʻah). The evolution of the path of religion is completed with Prophet Muhammad, and the cycle will conclude with the appearance of the *Qā'im*. (Tusi, 140)

On the Selection of the Prophet

Tusi repeatedly emphasizes the necessity of the Prophecy. In response to the question as to why God chooses Prophets, he postulates that if one group of people selects a Prophet, there might be disagreements among people about the said selection. Some may accept it and others may not. Therefore, a Prophet must be chosen by God and

must have a unique mission. Another evidence put forth for the validity of prophecy is that human society needs a group identity forming a community or a nation that holds values and establishes social norms to run the society.

Tusi argues, as did his predecessor Nasir Khusraw, that human beings do not have an active intellect to give them the capacity or consciousness to traverse on the spiritual path by themselves. He states: "human beings do not have the capacity to accept the noblest (highest celestial) matters without an intermediary; therefore, an intermediary is inevitable in such matters (of spiritual significance) and the Prophets were those intermediaries with regard to Divine matters, (*amr*) whose thoughts were like mirrors in front of the sun" (Tusi, 2005, 134). For him, 'noblest matters' relate to esoteric knowledge. This knowledge is received from the world of the universal intellect and soul. It is the most exclusive and rarest knowledge that is given to awakened and actualized intellects. The purpose of Prophets and Imams is to prepare believers to reach a stage where they are eligible to receive this unique knowledge.

Hence, the Prophet became the intermediary who assists human beings to progress from one stage to the next. They progress from learning names to learning meanings and that puts them on the path of reaching their destiny (Tusi, 2005, 134-5). From this (process of progression), two sets of responsibilities (*ḥukm*) emerged. One is to establish a code of conduct for worldly affairs. This responsibility deals with relationships of one human being to another and Prophets execute these rules. The other responsibility concerns resurrection and the hereafter, which relates to a human being's relation with Allah; the Imams, whose spiritual guidance enables people to be spiritually revived, execute this responsibility. However, these norms cannot be created arbitrarily. Hence, to avoid conflicts in society, it is necessary to have

a person who is appointed by God to execute God's will in relation to his creation.

Tusi postulates that human intellects are potential and human beings need education and practice to advance on the spiritual and intellectual journey. Therefore, human beings need a guide with an active (actualized) intellect who has the ability to guide them on the path, hence, the Prophets. Further, Tusi argues that creation is cascaded on different ranks. He suggests that each level of creation is qualitative different from the other. Minerals are different from vegetation and vegetation from animal, and animal from human. However, Prophets have the highest rank. The perfection of human beings is reached with Prophets who know the path. Tusi considered the excellence of Prophets was due to their spiritual awakening and having an intellect that is active. Further, they have ability to guide people on the spiritual path. Tusi reiterates the traditional Ismaili narrative of the correspondence between the spiritual and material worlds. He states that celestial entities of the Word (*kalimah*), the First Intellect, and the Universal Soul have corresponding manifestations in the material world. The Prophet, being manifestation of the Universal Soul, guides and protects human souls and leads them to their perfection (Ibid).

Prophets appeared in different nations according to the time and will of God. A Prophet is a change agent and transforms states, nations, languages, ethics, and relationships among people. The Prophet's nature is in total inner harmony in body, mind, and soul and with his environment and celestial world (Ibid).

The Nature and Role of the Prophet

Tusi describes the dual role of a Prophet by suggesting that a Prophet is a student and a teacher. He is a student in relation to the Divine, whereby he receives inspiration and revelation, and he is a teacher because he conveys and

teaches people the divine message according to each person's ability and capacity.

Accordingly, the Prophet also has a dual nature. He is a human being, with all worldly limitations, and he is connected with the spiritual world whereby he receives revelation and intuition. The Prophet receives revelation from the universal soul, which is also the guarded tablet, in allegorically similar ways as humans receives dreams; however, the Prophet receives the revelation with full consciousness directly from the Guarded Tablet (Ibid., 115).

Tusi gives other examples regarding the role of Prophet in society. He asserts that the Prophet is like a king who imposes rules and regulations on all people, whether those are sane and law abiding or those who may have tendencies to create chaos and social disturbance. A king makes standards and uniform policies to maintain social stability and peace in society. As a physician, the Prophet heals human souls from ailments and restores them to health. Hence, Prophet Muhammad managed and organized the community's affairs; he was the master and the guide on the (spiritual) path (*ṣāḥib-e sharī'at*), the entrusted Soul (*ruḥ al-Amīn*), and the manifestation (*maẓhar*) of the Universal Soul (Ibid).

Tusi attributes multiple roles to the Prophet such as *wāḍi'-e millat*, since he brings a community or a nation together, organizes it and manages it. Prophet Muhammad brought all Arabs and non-Arabs together and he managed the prevalent human madness engendered due to greed and prejudices, and brought about equality. Hence, Tusi's notion that he brought uniformity of rules and policies could refer to the lesson of equality he gave to his followers. In his last address to his followers, he said, "Arabs do not have any superiority over non-Arabs, whites over blacks, except those who follow the path of piety" (Ibn Ishaq, 1955).

The notion that the Prophet is the *ṣāḥib-e sharīʻat* means that he has mastery over the realm of religion that includes the spiritual path. Sharīʻah, broadly, has been understood or interpreted as the 'law'; however, another meaning that can be drawn is that the Prophet came to heal the human soul and put it on the path to achieve its destiny. The purpose of establishing a community that engages in spiritual practices and commits itself to doing good, is to take the journey, hence, *ṣāḥib-e sharīʻat*, could more appropriately mean that he is the master of the spiritual path to educate and guide people to their ultimate destiny. This role is more fitting within the context of Tusi's esoteric discourse.

This argument is further strengthened by the term *ruḥ al-Amīn* (the entrusted soul). In relation to Ismaili thought, the idea of Muhammad being *ruḥ al-Amīn,* could only mean that he is a noble soul that has achieved the ultimate inner balance, thus, peace, and who has been entrusted with the wisdom of the All-Wise and the knowledge that the *Luḥ-e maḥfūẓ* possesses. This interpretation is substantiated by the idea that the Prophet is the *maẓhar* of the Universal Soul (Tusi, 2005, 115).

While discussing the nature of miracles, Tusi asserts that miracles and supernatural events happen due to the Prophets' unique status and abilities. The Prophets have these extraordinary powers because they are connected with the spiritual world and spiritual entities support them. Here, Tusi's ideas are similar to Abu Hatim's ideas regarding the power of Prophets to perform miracles. Both concur that the true miracle brought by Prophet Muhammad is that of knowledge. Tusi argues that power has its limits but knowledge has the ability to silence opponents with intellectual proofs. Hence, in Muslim traditions, the Quran is considered the most important miracle of the Prophet, because it is an unparalleled source of knowledge. Likewise, Tusi states, "miracles are abilities or power which others are incapable of" (Ibid., 117).

Founding the Community

Tusi illustrates that the Prophet founded his community on the seven principles or pillars of religious and spiritual discipline. The Prophet brought a complete system of mystical and ethical practices that leads a person to her/his spiritual destiny. This may include certain prescribed rituals, practices, customs, values, and rules. Tusi states that the Prophet's mission was to inaugurate the religion of resurrection. Hence, the pillars of religion were derived from spiritual sources.

Tusi creates complementary binaries of principles that were intrinsically connected with each other and had spiritual origins. Jacques Lacan's (1981) theory of binary opposites describes these as a relationship in which one category of words is endowed with greater power than the other. One defines and the other term is defined in relation to the first one, such as male and female. The male in patriarchal society has greater power than the female, since female is defined in terms of absence of male characteristics. Alternatively, good and evil; in this relationship 'good' is granted greater social power than evil. Evil as a negative category is undesirable and deprived of any social power (Lacan, 2001).

Tusi offers a unique perspective for such binary complements. Unlike a Christian worldview, that regards human existence as sin or a result of it, Tusi, like other Ismaili writers, considers the world as not inherently evil. The creation of the world is based on spiritual principles. Its creation was an act of love. When the Universal Soul desired to return to its origin, one outcome of this desire was the creation of the world. In a similar way, the world assists the human soul to return to its origin. Therefore, the mundane and the spiritual are intrinsically interconnected. Tusi states, "All creation was derived from the primordial word (*amr*), the physical was derived from the spiritual, actions ought to be derived from knowledge, value added purpose from esoteric truths" (Tusi, 2005, 176-177).

Tusi establishes seven pillars of the religious path (Sharī'ah) on which the Prophet (peace be upon him) laid the foundations of his community. As explained earlier, since his invitation (to Islam) was the beginning of the end, all ethics were based on his commandments; physicals were derived from spirituals, actions were drawn from knowledge and contingent obtained from truths. The people of *ta'wīl* (interpretation) have established the true meaning for each pillar (Tusi, 2005, 142; 176-177):

1. Concerning *khalqiyyāt* (creation): it comprises of human relationships with creation, (*khalqiyyāt*) or all that exists. The Prophet founded worldly principles on the primordial principles of harmony and balance that existed in the act of creation. It was demonstrated through the Prophet's concerns for the environment, such as his statements about the protection and management of vegetation and water resources, respect for human life, and equitable treatment of men and women, even though they may belong to the opposite point of view or beliefs.
2. Concerning directives (*amriyyāt*): Tusi does not fully explain what he meant by the term *amriyyāt*. The term has several layers of meaning. The term *amr* means a command or an order. In an exoteric interpretation of the faith, it simply means prescriptions and commands that were ordained upon believers to follow as derived from the scriptures and other religious literature. At a more esoteric level, *amr* refers to the 'word' and *kalimah* that initiated the processes of creation and cyclical history. In the Quran, the word appears in two places; in Surah Ya Sin, "Surely, His Command, when He wills a thing, is only to say to it: "Be! And it is." Therefore, glory be to Him in Whose hand is the

Kingdom of all things, and to Him you shall be brought back (36:83). In another verse Allah says, "(Allah is) the Originator of the heavens and the earth. When He decrees a matter, He only says to it, "Be," and it is" (2:117). Both verses refer to the Allah's creative acts and also Allah's power and human destiny to return to the one who created all. Hence, the powerful word, the kalimah, believers use in meditation. It is the guide for disciples on their inner journey, and the Prophet or Imam bestows upon the seekers.

3. Concerning *Jismāniyyāt* (physicality) physical existence: *Jismāniyyāt* relate to physical well-being or all actions and behaviors that are related to the physical wellbeing of a person. The prophet acted like a mother of the community, suggested how to clean oneself and gave advice about physical cleanliness and health. Physical existence is connected with the spiritual, and both influence each other. Physical indulgences may create imbalance in intellectual and spiritual lives, hence hinder the journey towards the goal. Similarly, spiritual practices help a person to restore the balance, heal the human mind and spirit, and restore the physical body back to health and balance.

4. Concerning *Rūḥānniyāt* (spiritualties): *Rūḥānniyāt* consist of spiritual practices that are connected with physical acts and physical wellbeing. However, it is necessary for a person to take the journey on the path (Sharī'ah) in order to have single-mindedness and dedication regarding her/his spiritual goals.

5. Concerning *'Amaliyyāt* (human deeds): *'Amaliyyāt* relate to human actions, the daily business, activities, and thinking a person does.

There needs to be a balance between human engagement with worldly affairs and spiritual commitments. Over indulgence in worldly matters or laxity in ethical matters are detrimental to a person's journey along the path.

6. Concerning *'Ilmiyyāt* - the science of knowledge (Epistemology*)* relates to the pursuit of knowledge. The Ismaili Ṭariqah's emphasis on acquiring all forms of knowledge comes from the Prophet's advice on the pursuit of knowledge, making it obligatory for all believers. This is not confined to religious knowledge alone, but to all forms of knowledge. How could spiritual elevation occur if a person does not have open mindedness to accept diverse forms of knowledge and ignores wonderful contemplative opportunities that are given to human beings in the form of awe-inspiring natural beauty and majestic skies that open up to the divine grandeur. Hence, *'Ilmiyyāt* is not the accumulation of knowledge, but it is the immersion into a mode of living and acting that is infused by knowledge. It is a way of being and the life of person whose consciousness is fully awakened.
7. Concerning *Iḍāfāt* (relativity): *Iḍāfāt* are the relativity of all created things. All created things are the reflection of things eternal. Hence, having the status of relative means that all created things are internally connected with eternal truths and all depth of value and quality in human actions come from having an intrinsic relation with the eternal.

Prophet Muhammad's *dīn* encompasses all aspects of human life, not as dogma but as an inspirational, ethical, and intellectual system of ideas and values that transforms all aspects of a person, enabling her/him to

reach to the recesses of one's inner being. The Prophet performed practices such as offering prayers and meditations at non-suggested times, nighttime or early morning *dhikr*. *Dīn* can include offering voluntary services to uplift human folks from the depressed conditions of despair, as well as engaging in the mystical 'game' of generating new knowledge through the practice of *ta'wīl.*

Tusi reveals an esoteric process of *ta'wīl* in these seven principles. It is an intellectual process to decipher the inner meaning of the divine message and it is an inner journey that a human soul/intellect undertakes to return to its origin.

The Prophet's Mission and Human Consciousness

To encapsulate Ismaili thought of the Iranian period, according to Nasir Khusraw and Nasir al-Din Tusi, knowledge is at the core of the Prophet's mission. The Prophet created a system of values and a clear path on which believers should traverse. The mission of the Prophet was to create a spiritual discipline that enables people on the path to live a life of full consciousness.

The Prophet had dual responsibilities and his life reflected these communal and spiritual roles. His primordial nature connected him with the celestial world of intelligences, which gave him total inner harmony and balance. He also became, by virtue of his divine 'connection,' a Master who put together and managed a community of disciples who were engaged in the spiritual quest and could develop similar inner harmony.

By practicing what the Prophet prescribed, his disciples can develop an inner capacity to receive esoteric knowledge and the inner harmony that is enshrined in the message of the Prophet. Hence, Prophets in general and Prophet Muhammad in particular, demonstrate all the best qualities that human beings could have. In the case of Prophet Muhammad, these qualities are perfected in his

Prophetic disposition. Prophetic intellects are actualized and are in touch with the divine intellect and receive bliss from the celestial world of the holy. These exceptional qualities make them leaders of humanity who are qualified to guide humanity to their primordial destiny.



Chapter 7

Prophet Muhammad ﷺ in Ginans

The Origins of Ginanic Literature

Ginanic literature, composed in the Indian sub-continent by Ismaili Pirs from the 14th to the end of the 19th century, is a unique literary genre that applies various styles and includes a diverse range of content from Indian, Persian and Arabic literature (Moir & Shackle, 1992). The word Ginan comes from the Sanskrit word *gnan*, meaning knowledge. Ismailis in the Indian subcontinent practise them as a form of religious or spiritual knowledge, akin to Sufi and devotional poetry of the *bhakti* movement (Nanji, 1972).

Besides their expression as devotional poetry that focuses on the profound mystical love for the divine beloved, ginans cover a diverse range of other subjects. Devotion and love for the Prophet, the Imam of the time, and *ahl al-bayt* are just some of their central themes. Ginans mostly belong to the genre of poetry and hymns, and therefore, tend to exclude historical details. Occasional references to history are made to draw moral or spiritual lessons.

Ginanic literature draws much of its metaphorical content from classical Indian mythology as well as from the lifestyle of farmers and traders to whom it was addressed. The emphasis on spiritual growth, moral living and ethical business practices are central to the ginanic schematics. The recitation of ginans is a personal yet communal experience whereby participants receive allusions to ideas but are left to absorb their own interpretations and conclusions.

Little attention has been given to the question as to how the Ismaili community made the transition to vernacular languages and cultures for their teaching and preaching in Sindh. Historical traces of early da'wah activities in Sindh go back to 883 CE. The Ismaili da'wah successfully spread in Sindh and parts of Punjab and by 958 CE, the Ismaili state was established in Sindh with its headquarters at Multan (Nanji, 1978). Ismaili rule in Sindh ended in 1005 as a result of the invasion by Mahmud of Ghazni (d. 1030). Mahmud massacred Ismailis who were forced to go into hiding (Daftary, 2005). The Ismaili da'wah continued in various parts of Sindh, Punjab, Gujarat, and Kashmir.

The history of ginanic literature begins with Pir Sat Gur (the true teacher) Nur, the honorific name given to Sayyid Nur Muhammad. The arrival of Pir Sat Gur Nur changed the da'wah methodology. It appears that he came to India sometime between 1093-1143 after Mahmud of Ghazni's attacks when Raja Sidhraj Jaysinh was the ruler of Gujarat. The description of his arrival and encounter with priests is given in the ginan, *Putalā* (1905/ VS 1962). This may have been the turning point in Ismaili da'wah in Sindh and Hind when it adopted indigenous form. Henceforth, succeeding Pirs and Sayyids used ginans as the means to preach and teach the community about the faith and its values.

The ginans are a living, oral tradition that started to appear in text/print form only in the late 19th and early 20th

centuries. As such, they remain a practiced, oral tradition that that is central to the religious and spiritual discourse of the Ismaili community. At this juncture, their historicity or even the historicity of their creators, the Pirs, is offset by the greater significance they still play in contributing to the inherited wisdom, ethical understanding and spiritual growth of the community as a form of ta'wīl in the spiritual journey of adherents.

The Spiritual Guide in Ginans

The Ginanic core message focusses on the concept and centrality of the spiritual guide in the form of the Prophet and the Imam with the Pir as a teacher of this message. Each human being has a destiny and each person has to undertake a personal, spiritual search to fulfill it. In this process, humankind needs a guide and these guides are represented in the form of Prophets and Imams. In the Ginanic *weltanschauung*, Muhammad and Ali have been present for eons but in *Kal Yug,* a period of immense difficulties, they have appeared to guide humanity to the realization of their destiny.

Prophet Muhammad is generally described as the divine light that guides human beings on the spiritual path. He established the *Sat-paṅth* (The true path; an equivalent to Quranic term, *ṣirāt al-mustaqīm* (the straight path). This path offers the knowledge, grace, and guidance required by humanity to reach their final destiny. Prophet Muhammad is the last Prophet in the chain of Prophets and his mission is to protect, bless, and guide believers. His mission continues through his progeny, the chain of Imams. Recalling the invitation (da'wah) or call to the mission in the ginan, *Sāchā merā khālak*, Pir Shams Sabzawari (died 675 AH /1276 CE) states (1900, 39-40),

Eji, Nabī Muhammad khudā kā pyārā
Nabī Muhammad ko āyā pukārā

Dear, Nabi Muhammad is the beloved of Allah

Nabi Muhammad received his calling.

Pir Shams relates the mystical notion of love between the Prophet and Allah. For Pir Shams, the Prophet is the object of the love of Allah. Hence, Muhammad receives the call to Prophethood from Allah because of this relationship of trust and endearment.

Prophet Muhammad's role in Ismaili Ginanic literature has some unique and original features. However, its core message is consistent with the principles found in general Muslim literature, which assert that the Prophet was specially endowed with intellectual and spiritual gifts, whereby he is the perfect guide and teacher (*al-Insān al-Kāmil*) for humanity who can lead them to their spiritual destiny.

Ismailis define themselves as a Tariqah, a group of people engaged in the spiritual quest. Thereby, the Prophet's role in ginans reflects such spiritual and esoteric dimensions of the faith. Foremost, he is the divine light (*nūr*) present since the beginning of time, and his light guides the entire humanity. A hadith reports Prophet Muhammad stating, "I was the Prophet when Adam was still between water and clay" (Lings, 1996, 67). Ginans in this respect, reflect the *aḥādīth al-qudsī*, the sacred sayings of Prophet, that allude to his divine nature as the divine light that always existed. In the present cycle (era), that divine light appears in the physical form of Prophet Muhammad.

Focusing on the inner reality of Prophetic *Nūr* (light), ginans further inform us that he is the last Prophet, and he completed the religion of Islam. It reinforces the core idea present in the Holy Quran that all guidance provided by Allah is part of Islam, beginning from Adam. For this reason, Muslims accept all Prophets who came through the Abrahamic chain, as well as other Prophets, sages, and saints who might have appeared in different parts of the world. The Quran says, "We did send Prophets before you and we have told you stories of some of them and there are

others whose stories we haven't told you" (Quran: 40:78). In another verse, it says, "To every community we sent a Prophet" (Quran: 10:47). Hence, Muslims in the diverse communities where Islam spread were able to embrace and incorporate their traditions and spiritual leaders as prophets and respect them although the Quran does not mention their names.

Finally, ginans emphasize the role of Prophet Muhammad as the patriarch of the chain of Imams, who succeed him through the progeny of Ali ibn Abi Talib and Bibi Fatima al-Zahra. Hence, the Imams are not only the transmitters of Muhammad's teaching but also the bearers of his light (*nūr*). They are the spiritual guides who are responsible for the deliverance of believers in each period, guiding them on the spiritual path. A unique feature of Ginanic literature is the use of literary imagery acquired from Indo-Pak culture. The concept of cyclical time and the idea of *avatār* resonate with earlier Ismaili hierarchies of *Nāṭiq* and *Asās* and the chain of intellects found in the philosophical system of Hamid al-Din Kirmani (1953). Prophets and Imams are part of cosmic history and their presence is required to guide people in their spiritual quest.

Muhammad: The Spiritual Guide and Companion

Ginanic literature is rife with references to Prophet Muhammad as the source and epitome of spiritual knowledge. This chapter draws from the large corpora of such literature to illustrate understandings of Prophet Muhammad in the ginans.

Pir Sadr al-Din, the 14th century Ismaili savant, describes the events surrounding the birth of Prophet Muhammad in his ginan, "*Sāt sarag nā kaṅi khuliyā che duwār*." (1934, 1:91-93; 1969, 1:77) The Pir evokes the imagery of grandeur and celebration across times and the cosmic worlds. All saints, prophets, and angels have gathered to celebrate Muhammad's birth. The world is decorated with gold and silver ornaments. On this

auspicious day, the doors of heavens are flung open. Pir Sadr al-Din says,

> *Jire bhāi re sāt sarag nā kāṅi khuliyā che duwār*
> *jis din Nabī Mahamad janamiya 1*
>
> Dear brother, the doors of the seven heavens flung open
> The day Prophet Muhammad was born
>
> *Jire bhāi re tetrīs karoḍ devtāe milī kīdho ucharaṅg*
> *nave khaṅdhe meṅ shāhjī nā nishān guṇiyā* 2 (1969, 77).
>
> Dear brother, 33 crore celestial beings gathered and celebrated
> On nine continents, our Lord's signs are praised

In this superluminal description, distances of time and space are erased when Prophet Muhammad was born. It exemplifies a cosmic event that changes the destiny of humanity. Saints and sages, prophets and angels (33 crore = 330 million) from different continents and periods of history gathered to celebrate this cosmic event. This narrative raises the Prophet's status to the highest level. It gives him command over time and space.

In another ginan, *Gun Terā Sāmī Rājā,* Pir Sadr al-Din (1969, 1:117) says,

> *Se var rāt sabhāgī bhāi jite nī Mahamad jāyā*
>
> Brother, indeed the night when Muhammad was born was an auspicious one.

In "*Pahela Kartā Jug maṅhe Sonā nāre Ghāṭ"* (1934, 3:95; 1952, 156-57) recited during the *ghaṭ pāṭ* ceremony, Pir Sadr al-Din further explains the four Yugs (cycles) of the ancient Indian calendar, which are *Satya Yug*, *Treta Yug*, *Duwapar Yug* and *Kali Yug*. *Kalap* is the combination of all four. The *Satya Yug* is the longest among the four and is considered as the golden era in which truth and wisdom prevailed. It is followed by *Treta Yug* that is compared with silver and comprised of 75% of

goodness and the creeping in of ignorance and corruption. In *Duwapar Yug* corruption and ignorance increases to 50% and it is labelled as the age of copper. The *Kali* or *Kal Yug* as named in ginans is not only the shortest but is also worst of all *yugs*. The Pir compares it to clay. The transition from the era of gold to clay is indicative of moral and spiritual decline.

Pir Sadr al-Din's *Budh Avatār* (1919/VS 1975) is an extensive narrative (*granth*= long ginan] about *Kal Yug*, the last cycle of time. The events occur at the cusp of time when the transition from *Duwapar Yug* to *Kal Yug* is about to take place. The Pir points out that religions are valid only when scriptures and places of worship embody the Divine Presence. Without the Divine Presence, temples turn into buildings of mortar and stone and do not provide a connection with the divine. He reiterates that the Brahmins, who mediated between the divine and human, have lost that ability in the era of *Kal Yug.* Without that relationship, they are unable to be the link between people and the divine.

In *Kal Yug*, Nabi Muhammad is the mediator between God and humans. Pir Sadr al-Din's idea of divine presence in the form of Prophet Muhammad is similar to the notion regarding the acceptance of the Prophet of the time described by Sijistani (see chapter 5). Sijistani considers that if a person remains in the cycle of the previous Prophet, he or she follows a path that has lost its spirit. For, it is essential to follow the living guide, whose teaching and sharing of divine grace enable the devotee to connect with Allah.

In several verses of *Budh Avatār* (1919), the Pir draws attention to the divine nature of the Prophet. Pir Sadr al-Din candidly states,

Bhīrāmaṇ māṅhe thi bhramaj gayā
teṇe rūp Nabī Mahamad kā liyā

Divinity has left the Brahmins
And has taken the form of Nabī Muhammad ─ 36

Sadr al-Din reiterates that believers follow Prophet Muhammad because they recognize him as the true manifestation of Gur Brahma, the spiritual master Brahma. The status of Brahma is that he creates and hence, is the essence of creation. He is the beginning and the return of the creation. The Pir further states (1919, 16),

> *Tare tīrath sarwe tapsī Gur Nabī Mahamad pāse gayā*
> *Gur Bhīrmāji nu avatār te Nabī Mahamad thayā*
>
> Then all pilgrims went to Prophet Muhammad
> [Since] Prophet Muhammad is the manifestation of Gur Brahma. ─ 397

In other verses, the Pir describes the conditions of *Kal Yug;* even though Gur Brahma appeared in *Kal Yug,* people are heedless and fail to recognize his presence amongst them. In Hindu mythology, Gur Brahma has four heads and four arms showing his power and knowledge. His lack of recognition by people suggests their intellectual and spiritual slumber and not just their blindness to his physical manifestation.

Kal Yug is an era of excessive materialism, a time in which easy access to true knowledge and spiritual wisdom is lacking. The Pir emphasizes that the spirit will be unstable in *Kal Yug*. Moral and spiritual conditions are degraded to the extent that only a small percentage of people will stay on the true path. The majority will indulge in materialism and transgress moral boundaries. Since the recognition of the Prophet is tied to goodness and wisdom, the lack of such knowledge during *Kal Yug* means that people do not have the prerequisite conditions to recognize the Prophet. Hence, people do not know the status and power of the Prophet, which is a prerequisite for gaining spiritual wisdom.

Sadr al-Din further suggests that those who do not recognize the Prophet are like the people who worshipped idols. The Pir might be alluding to the historical period before Muhammad that was called 'the age of ignorance'.

Therefore, the Pir suggests that failing to know the Prophet is like returning to idol worship and the age of ignorance. Prophet Muhammad is considered the true guide and failing to acknowledge him means a person loses the spiritual master who could guide him/her from ignorance to knowledge and from darkness to light. Pir Sadr al-Din further remarks in *Budh Avatār* (1919, 18):

> *Āj Kaljug maṅhe Gur Brahma te Nabī Mahamad hoy*
> *tene gaphil duniyā na jāṇe koy*
>
> Today, during the *Kal Yug*, Gur Brahma is Prophet Muhammad,
> [Though] The heedless world does not recognize him. — 425
>
> *Āj na jāṇe Satgur Nabī Mahamad nā ṭhām*
> *te pathar muratne kare paraṇām*
>
> Today if you do not know the status of Prophet Muhammad
> It is like worshiping stone idols. — 432

Hence, Pir Sadr al-Din emphasizes that the important aspect of *Kal Yug* is the Prophet's manifestation in the world. People's inability to recognize him means that they miss the opportunity to advance spiritually and intellectually.

Pir Sadr al-Din in *Mahamad Mavji Āvīyā* (1905, 21-22; 1934, 5:66-67; 1952, 202-203) iterates the redeeming feature of *Kal Yug* by stating,

> *Eji sarve jug thī baḍā kal-jug*
> *temā āvyā Mahamad murār 19*
>
> Dear, kal yug is greater than all other eras
> [Since] Lord Muhammad arrived there

Hence, the Pir considers that *Kal Yug,* despite being the shortest in duration and with all its demerits, may be greater and nobler than all other yugs just because Prophet Muhammad was born in this era, thus raising the Prophet's

status to the highest level possible. It is an endearing and beautiful way of expressing love and devotion to the Prophet. Even though there were sages and mystics who had achieved the highest spiritual status in earlier eons, Prophet Muhammad transcends the achievements of all previous epochs in the most difficult times. Hence, the belief that Prophet Muhammad's characteristics remediate all the difficulties and vices that *Kal Yug* could bring. Muhammad brings joy and the fulfillment of spiritual goals to human souls making their spiritual journey and sojourn in eternity peaceful.

In the Granth "*Būjh Niraṅjan*" (*Know the Invisible*), Pir Sadr al-Din (2006, 70) states,

Jo būjhe mārag Pir Sadardin kerā
jo hay sadā qabūl re
sab nabioṅ ke sartāj hay
so dūlha Nabī Rasūl re

Seek the path of Pir Sadr al-Din
Which is favored at all times
Indeed, the epitome of all Prophets
Is the bridegroom Prophet Messenger

Pir Sadr al-Din declares that the path he is inviting people to is the same path that the Prophet introduced. His message is endorsed. Prophet Muhammad, the bridegroom, the messenger, is the leader among all Prophets. In Sindh and other parts of South Asia, Sufi poets used the imagery of the bridegroom to highlight the spiritual process and union with the divine. They celebrate the groom on his way to meet his bride as a scene of festivity and celebration. The groom is the head and focus of this celebration as he embarks upon the journey to meet his beloved. The groom is not only the leader of the wedding party but is also its most important guest.

By describing the Prophet as the groom, the Pir alludes to the notion that Prophet Muhammad has achieved spiritual union with Allah. Among the sufis of Indian sub-

continent and elsewhere, the death of a sufi master is celebrated as *urs* (wedding), meaning the sufi master has achieved spiritual union with Allah. Furthermore, Pir Sadr al-Din declares Prophet Muhammad as the leader among prophets to affirm his elevated status.

Pir Hasan Kabir al-Din (d. 1470) also demonstrates the greatness of Prophet Muhammad with a unique example. In his granth (long ginan), *Anaṅt Akhāḍo* (2006, 25), he states,

Āshājī kalap jug thī kaljug moṭo
je māṅhe Nabī Muhammad āyā jī
jīvuṅ ne gher vadhāmṇa hośe
hośe te dīn ni vāṭ __397

Oh hopeful one, *Kal Yug* is greater than *kalap*
Since Prophet Muhammad appeared therein
Celebrations reign in house[1] of the soul
And the religious discourse prevails.

Recognizing the true nature and stature of the Prophet is not a given. In *Pustak paḍī paḍī paṅḍit thākā* (1936, 2:184-85) Pir Hasan Kabir al-Din conveys a powerful message by contrasting the mundane with the spiritual. He states,

Ke jere bhāi pustak paḍī paḍī paṅḍit thākā
paṇ ilāhī kā bhed na pāyā — 1

Oh dear brothers, the preacher is exhausted by repeatedly reading books
Yet never discovering the secrets of divinity

The purveyors of religion within a religious community, preachers and priests, often focus on the rote

[1] The above translation does not convey the meaning that the verses are trying to convey. The third and fourth line could mean that believers will celebrate because the body, meaning the house in which soul resides will attain joy and momins will partake in the profound knowledge that Prophet Muhammad brought. Terms like ghar (Arabic=bayt) house and vāṭ the path or ṭarīqah have pivotal significance in Ismaili thought.

reading of scriptures and other religious writings. Often, they proclaim themselves as protectors of religious doctrine and scriptural knowledge. Their rigidity in preserving certain forms of doctrinal knowledge creates stagnation in their own and their communities' spiritual growth. The doctrines and dogma that the religious oligarchy defines become the narrative for the Truth. The control over the definition of truth narratives gives them tremendous power. They develop vested interest in the preservation of those forms of knowledge and develop resistance to change. Further, their own knowledge becomes a standard to judge the truth of other forms of knowledge; therefore, they reject other perspectives. Their way of thinking and believing closes them off other venues of experiencing and knowing the truth.

Hasan Kabir al-Din suggests that such rote and repetitive readings limit their knowledge of the divine. He indicates that as much as they devote themselves to the learning of doctrine, they cannot find the truth on the essence of divinity. This is a very important point in spiritual practices: spiritual experiences are formless and unpredictable. A person, alongside the practice of '*ibādat,* must keep an open mind and be ready to receive them at any place and any time. For Ismailis, the Quran guides them to discover the divine truth through contemplation and through experiencing nature and the world around and within themselves. Hence, philosophy, sciences, arts, and literature are important sources of receiving inspiration. The ginan further states,

> *Ke jere bhāi Allah Mahamad chit thī vīsāri ne meleā*
> *tis dhaṅdhe thī Brāhmaṇ bhūlyā 2* (1936,184)

> Oh dear brothers, those who have lost the awareness of Allah and Muhammad
> That same [pre]occupation led Brahmans to forget their way.

The above verse points out that the people who lost Allah and Muhammad from their consciousness were like the priest and preacher class who lost their path. The Pir notes that all those, whether preachers or common people, who lost their path to divine recognition made the same mistake. Their minds were fully occupied with literal and worldly matters, which made them forget the divine and the essence of Muhammad.

Pir Hasan Kabir al-Din reinforces the idea that the recognition of Muhammad is not merely an acceptance of his Prophethood, but also entails a different kind of journey to reach the knowledge of his spiritual origin. Here, the Pir is identifying Muhammad as the mirror of divine truth, whose recognition leads to divine recognition. Muhammad becomes path and destination; Muhammad's teachings provide methods, necessary knowledge, and experiences for receiving spiritual truths. The ginan further notes (1936, 184),

> *Ke jere bhāi, dhartī na hotī āsmān na hotā*
> *tāre na thī parathmī māyā* — 3
>
> Oh dear brothers, neither the earth existed, nor the sky
> Nor did transitory universe exist.
>
> *Ke jere bhāi, chāndo na hotā, suraj na hotā*
> *tāre Mahamad nām arsh likhāyā* — 4
>
> Oh dear brothers, neither the moon nor the sun existed
> Even then Muhammad's name was written in the heavens.

In these two verses, Hasan Kabir al-Din informs us that the Sacred Name of Muhammad existed before any physical object existed. The Pir is referring to the first act of creation that generated the material world. Muhammad is the representation of the Universal Intellect, the greatest name or the Word (*al-ism al-ā'ẓam*). The Word (also

Logos) created the world and that Word is the sacred name of Muhammad. Despite teaching about the significance of the role of the Prophet in achieving salvation, Kabir al-Din states that believers still do not understand the exalted status of the Prophet. He laments,

Ke jere bhāi, e ame ginān kaṅthi kaṅthi thākā
paṇ Mahamad Ilāhī vīsāreā — 9 (1936,185; 1950, 52)

Oh dear brothers, we got tired by repeatedly explaining spiritual knowledge.
Even then, believers forget Muhammad and Allah.

Hasan Kabir al-Din states that he got tired of explaining esoteric knowledge about the Prophet and Allah yet believers still forget the *dhikr* (remembrance) of Muhammad and Allah.

This indicates the difficulty of teaching and making people understand esoteric knowledge. Learning esoteric knowledge requires inner preparation and receptivity. From birth, human beings develop their identity and their social persona takes over. Identity is built around external marks such as gender, shape, color of skin, religion, and social class to name a few. The cross section of these identities camouflages our true nature, and as we grow older, external identities, needs, and desires are solidly cemented in our consciousness. Further, these often deeply bury our authentic identity and genuine desire for spiritual search.

Pir Hasan Kabir al-Din expresses his disappointment by saying that he has been explaining to people for a longtime but no one seems to understand the significance of the spiritual search. Several Pirs have expressed this sentiment. We find similar disappointment expressed in other ginans. In the ghaṭ pāṭ ginan, *Tyaṅthi ame āvīyā ūnch maṅ,* Pir Shams Sabzawari (1933, 6:47; 1952, 68) refers to such an attitude:

Eji Jamāt ghaṭ thāpanā karse
tiāṅ anek jīv malse sār

tiāṅ koik nūr ne jānse,
bākī sarve duniyā vehvār 4

The Jamat will establish ghaṭpāṭ (congregate)
Where people will gather
Where very few will recognize the Light
While the remaining are preoccupied with worldly affairs

Pir Sadr al-Din (1934, 5:87) also states,

Thar thar moman koi koi rahese
The true faithful will be few and far apart.

Momins who achieve the state of certitude will be rare to find. Hence, pessimism about the attitude of believers is generally prevalent among Pirs.

In the ginan, *Kaljug goḍ andhāre upanā,* Sayyid Imam Shah (1936, 2:60-61) says,

Eji sācho sat-paṅth gur ji no kahīye,
te jīv rahese virlā koī 8

On the true path of the spiritual Master
Few souls will remain

Sayyid Imam Shah further reiterates:

Eji til til-nā sāheb lekhā leyse
tāre sati virlā koi— 19

When the Master takes account of every action
Very few will be among the truthful

In *Pustak paḍī paḍī (*1935, 2:184-85; Mahān 3, 1950, 52)*,* Pir Hasan Kabir al-Din, emphasizing the centrality of Muhammad in interceding on behalf of believers, cautions,

Ke jere bhāi, Mahamad Ilāhī āh dhaṇī che
tame dil māṅheṅ karo ne vichār— 10

Oh dear brothers, the Divine Muhammad is the Lord.
Reflect on this in your hearts.

Hence, Muhammad is the Lord - the Master who takes care of physical and spiritual needs. He is responsible for the wellbeing of the brethren who are urged to consider this matter carefully. The emphasis on '*reflect in your heart'* refers to the necessity for seekers to register this notion in their consciousness as a way to understand esoteric knowledge through this method of deep reflection. Further, Imam Shah understood that if you reflect deeply about the nature of Muhammad, he would show you the way and assist you to achieve your goals since he is the Master who embodies all aspects of human life. A person achieves awareness and wisdom through the spiritual master. Hence, the Pir's ginan provides wisdom and clues on the spiritual path and those who pay attention and develop the capacity to decipher its meaning will be rewarded through the discovery of esoteric knowledge.

Similarly, several other ginan writers highlight the status of the Prophet. Sayyid Saleh (1933/ VS 1983, 6:9) describes the role of Prophet Muhammad as the one whose spirit was present throughout ages. He says,

> *Ye mīṭhā Mahamad nām suno bhāi munivaro* — 1
> Oh believers, listen to this sweet name of Muhammad.
>
> *Chār jug nī belī*
> *sohī Mahamad āj* — 8
>
> The companion through all four ages
> Is none other than Muhammad today.
>
> *Nabī sarīkhā chānd nā*
> *so dono divlā hāth - suno* — 9
>
> The Prophet is like the moonlight;
> hold this lamp in your hands.

In these verses, Sayyid Saleh is speaking about the eternity of *nūr-e Muhammadi* or Muhammad's Light that is present among believers.

In Shia and Sufi philosophies, the *nūr* of Muhammad and 'Ali existed prior to the creation of the world. During the Arabic period of Ismaili philosophy, the idea of *nūr-i Muḥammadi* is expressed as *al-'aql al-awwal* (the first intellect or '*aql-e kulli* the all-encompassing intellect) and *al-'aql al-thāni* (the second intellect or *nafs-i- kulli* the all-encompassing Spirit). Their presence inspired, guided, and abetted seekers on the true path (*al-ṣirāt al-mustaqīm*). Further, these verses reinforce the idea of intimacy and omnipresence with use of the word *'belī.'* The equivalent word in Arabic is *rafīq.* The term *rafīq* has a profound meaning in Islamic mysticism (*taṣawwuf)*. Ibn al Arabi beautifully explains, "Allah is the intimate Companion (*Jālis*) of those who remember Him, and those who 'remember' Him do witness the Companion" (Izutsu, 1984, 251). Prophet Muhammad's last words on his deathbed were '*al-rafīq al-a'lā*,' 'Companionship with the Highest.' The Sindhi word, '*belī*' is a translation of the term, '*rafīq',* which means friend, companion, protector, and helper. In Sindh, people commonly use the term *Allāh belī,* when a person is leaving a gathering or departing for a journey. The phrase means, May *Allah be your companion and protector*. Hence, the Pir alludes that as the companion on your spiritual journey, Muhammad is the light that shows you the path and guides you.

Light contrasts with darkness. The spiritual path is a simile for the darkness of the unknown and the secret (only initiated disciples have privilege to the path) is a simile of darkness. Therefore, the light of Muhammad is the guide on the path. Sayyid Saleh also cues us about the secret sacred word that a believer is given to concentrate on. In the first verse, he says, "Listen oh believers, Muhammad's name is sweet." In *taṣawwuf* and the Ismaili Tariqah*,* the spiritual master (Murshid or the Imam) gives believers a sacred name to meditate upon. These names, taken from the Holy Quran, and attributed as the names of Allah, the Prophet, or Imams, are given to a disciple

according to his/her spiritual status or station on the path. The word, or the greatest name, *al-ism al-ā'ẓam* is the light, which is bestowed upon the seeker through the light of Prophet Muhammad and conveyed to generations of seekers through his progeny. Therefore, Muhammad is the light and he is the sacred and the greatest name for seekers to meditate upon.

When it is night, a lamp gives light in the darkness and shows the path. Similarly, Prophet Muhammad is the light in all ages and guides people in difficult times and through times of confusion and sorrow. The analogy to moonlight has both spiritual and mundane significance. On a dark night, moonlight is all encompassing, spreading its glow over all existence. It is comforting and soothing. It creates a sense of peace, makes things visible, the unknown known. It shows the path, which would have been invisible otherwise.

One of the Prophet's titles is, "mercy for all worlds." Moonlight symbolizes that mercy, which encompasses the entire universe, and creates a sense of serenity. This role of the Prophetic light is collective and universal. Mulla Sadra (d. 1640) referring to the *Ishrāqī* philosophy of Shaykh al-Maqtul Shihab al-Din Suhrawardi (d. 1191), explains that "the light unveils symbols, extracts their treasures, records their sciences, sheds light on their concepts, exposes their stations and explains their allusions, [light] is a simple (*basīṭah*) and self-manifesting reality, which brings other things to manifestation" (2008, 36).

The other role of the Prophet's light is individualistic, in which, the Light of Muhammad is a lamp in each seeker's hand. It guides them in the darkness. This analogy has multiple layers of meaning. At one level, this light, as wisdom, guides individuals; at another level, when an individual becomes stagnant on the spiritual path, the Prophet's light shows her or him the way. When a seeker (*sālik*) on the path faces the state where she/he feels that her/his soul is unresponsive to spiritual signs and loses

consciousness about its own spiritual state (*maqām*), as if it had turned into a stone and is unable to receive bliss, the prophet's light shows her/him the way. Whether person is moving forward on the path or is in dormant state, this condition creates a sense of despair. In this condition the seeker needs to continue her/his practices, or prescribed '*ibādāt,* and seeks assistance from the light of Muhammad rather than giving up the journey on the path.

The light of Muhammad is intellectual as well. It unfolds the inner meaning of the Quran and shows signs that a seeker encounters on the path. Further, it gives clues (allusions) to what might lie ahead. It is also life affirming. The Quran says that the Prophet guides seekers from darkness to light, from mortality to eternity, from ignorance to gnosis, and from death to life. Hence, the light is comparable to life, an awakened intellect, and a living soul.

There is a Sufi story about a boy who was sitting outside his village at night with a lamp in his hand. A woman passed by, stopped, and asked, "Why are you sitting here?"

The young man answers, "I am taking a long journey and it is a dark night, and I have a small lamp, which does not give much light. I'm wondering how I can take such a long journey with this small lamp."

The wise woman says, "The light you have brightens all your surroundings; as you take the journey, the light will move with you. You take one step at a time, but this lamp gives you more light than you need. Begin your journey and this light will go with you through your entire journey."

Another meaning of this light is that when it is night, a seeker gets up from her/his slumber and sits in '*ibādat* or *dhikr* (meditation). At that time, when the seeker is disconnected from the world, she/he takes the lone journey on the path; the light, which is the sacred word, accompanies her/him. The light never leaves the side of

the seeker; this unique light — the word — is as the Holy Quran describes it in the powerful mystical *Āyāt Nūr*:

> Allah is the Light of the heavens and the earth. The example of His light is like a niche within which is a lamp, the lamp is within glass, the glass as if it were a pearly [white] star lit from [the oil of] a blessed olive tree, neither of the east nor of the west, whose oil would almost glow even if untouched by fire. Light upon light. Allah guides to His light whom He wills. And Allah presents examples for the people, and Allah is Knowing of all things (Quran, 24:35).

Nūr-e Muhammadi illuminates the internal and external worlds of a traveler. The *Nūr* assists a traveler in inner turmoil, external crisis, and guides a person to navigate through the vicissitudes of life's passages.

In the ginan, *Alaf nirāle khālak rājā* (1890, 34; 1932, 4:106; 1952, 49), Pir Sadr al-Din, after describing various human conditions and behaviors that could lead to hell, poses a question,

> *Ejī būjere bhāi chatra koṇ taṇā*
> *chatra Mahmad Mustaphā taṇā jī* — 10
>
> Do you know, Oh brother, who your protector is?
> Muhammad Mustafa is your protector

Muhammad's grace and presence protects believers. The power of Muhammad's name also assists believers when they face difficulties. In Islamic traditions, it is believed that on the Day of Judgment, all Prophets will gather with their communities and people will be in great distress. "And those whom they invoke besides Allah have no power of intercession; only he who bears witness to the Truth, and with full knowledge" (Quran: 85-86). Prophet Muhammad will intercede and ease the pain and Allah will accept Muhammad's intercession and humanity will be saved from the pain and sufferings of Judgement Day.

In *Anaṅt Akhāḍo*, Pir Hasan Kabir al-Din (2006, 76) says,

Āshājī nūr pyālā Nabī yun deśe
rikhisar ubhā pīve jī
amrat mevā anaṅt āve
sarve rikhisar ne ghar deśe — 399

Nabi Muhammad will give a bowl of light
Believers will stand up and imbibe it
Nectar and fruit will overflow
He will distribute it to the homes of all devotees

In the indigenous traditions of Sindh, when a spiritual master bestows a gift to a follower, the follower stands up, bows, and makes a scoop of two hands to receive the gift. This act of standing up is a ritual stance of submission and commitment to follow the Master's guidance. The gift could be a small piece of candy, but it represents a web of meanings and relationships that go deeper than the physical act. In Muslim traditions, it is believed that those who reach heaven will receive an abode, a home. There is a common expression in Sindhi -*ākhrat jo ghar*- that envisions life in the hereafter, where a seeker would find a space of peace and stability. Here, the search of the soul ends and achieves peace and certitude. Hence, when the ginanic verse describes that Prophet Muhammad distributes nectar and fruit, it means that the Prophet abundantly rewards a seeker for the difficulties she or he undertakes to achieve the state of peace.

Power of the Prophet's Name

Although Prophet Muhammad's power of intercession is abundantly described in Islamic literature, in ginans this power accompanies the *momin* (faithful) from the very moment of birth. In the ginan *"Eji seṭh kahe tame sāṅbhalo vāṇotar*" (1934, 90-92; 1952, 154-55; *cf.* Shackle & Moir, 1992, 118) Pir Sadr al-Din describes the power of

Prophet Muhammad's bliss from the very inception of birth into the world by saying,

> *Eji nav mās tuṅ ne peṭ māṅhe rākheā,*
> *Nabi Mahamad baṅdh chuḍāyā*
>
> For nine months you were kept in the womb
> Till Prophet Muhammad released [you] from the bondage

The ginan refers to the restrictive condition that a person endures in the womb and it is the Prophet's bliss that releases the person from such confinement. This analogy could be extended to the condition that human beings suffer in the world; only through the *barakah* of the Prophet can human beings achieve freedom. The Prophet is a life affirming force for a true believer. The Prophet and his progeny bestow intellectual and spiritual awakening upon believers and revive their souls from perpetual slumber and spiritual dormancy. These ideas are beautifully ascribed to Pir Shams in a ginan by Sayyid Imam Shah.

In the long ginan (granth), *Moman Chetāmaṇī* (1924; VS 1980), Sayyid Imam Shah (d. 1534**)** narrates a powerful story about Pir Shams (d. 1356). It is an allegorical story about the power of Prophet Muhammad's name. This could be a story to meditate upon and thereby unveil layers of meanings from it. Even a literalist reading may draw conclusions that challenge normative understandings.

As the story goes, Pir Shams had a disciple who was the son of the king of Ucchh, Multan. It so happened that the king's son passed away. The King was in distress and invited all the learned Sayyids (believed to be from the family of Prophet) from the city, and said, "I have heard that the Prophet's progeny has the power to bring a dead person back to life. Since you claim to be the descendants of the Prophet, I ask you to bring my son back to life." All the scholars come together and pray for the boy but none

are able to revive him. The king was upset and he warned them that if his son was not revived, they would be punished. The Sayyids had heard about the miraculous powers of Pir Shams, who had travelled on a boat made of paper. They went out to look for him. They find him sitting by the riverbank. They urge him to come with them to the palace and revive the king's son. Pir Shams asked them,

Eji Sat gur Shams tare pūchiyūṅ
ā śaher māheṅ nahī koi Paygambar nu parīvār
jeṇethi e bālak oṭhē
je che padshah no parīvār — 284

Then the true master Shams asked them:
"Is there no one from the family of the Prophet
Who could awaken the boy?
One who is from the family of the King?"

Eji amere gulām Nabī Muhammad taṇa
śīyo che amāro bhār
je olīyā is nagar taṇā
tene pūchīne karo takrār — 285

I am but a slave of Nabī Muhammad
It is a heavy burden to bear
Those who are saints in this city
Go to them and urge them (to help you)

Eji jeṭlā hata teṭlā bolīyā
Sāheb ame pūchiyūn te shaher apār
have māt tāt tame thāo
to ugarīe ame ne amārāṅ parīvār — 286 (1925, 36)

All who were present there said
Master, we have asked everyone in the city
You are our mother and father
Relieve us and our families (from this ordeal)

Eji tāre maher karī ne murshid uṭhīyā
te to āvīya pādshah ne dwār

bāṅh gahī ne bāḷak oṭhaḍīo
te oṭhaḍio teṇīj vār — 287 (1925, 37)

Then, out of mercy, the Murshid got up
Arrived at the door of the King
He held the child's hand and woke him
He instantly awakened him.

In this allegorical ginan, the King is the human intellect that manages and controls all human affairs; it also provides nourishment to the human body, mind, and potentially soul. However, the mystical journey begins when the rational faculty recognizes that it has limitations and spiritual matters are beyond its capacity. At that juncture, a person needs a guide, a *murshid* to awaken the dead soul and lead it on the path. Sometimes, even when a person has a murshid, she/he is preoccupied with external rituals, customs, and worldly affairs. That individual fails to recognize the significance of the presence of the Master and remains in slumber.

Such is the case with the child of the King. His youth refers to his neophyte status. He thinks that obtaining exoteric knowledge and performing rituals is sufficient; as the result, the soul remains dormant. Although the boy is a disciple of Pir Shams, he is not able to recognize the necessity of abandoning the outer and rational quest. The intellect searches for guidance. Eventually this process of research and exploration leads to the knowledge that the spiritual master is in the form of Pir Shams, who has the power and authority as a descendent of the Prophet; he has the name, *al-ism al-ā'ẓam* – to awaken a soul.

Another important symbol is the use of the term, *dwār*, meaning entrance, threshold, or presence. A threshold or entrance is a juncture. Paradoxically, the door is a point of meeting and separation; it is a place where two qualitatively different states of existence meet and separate. In our daily experiences, we notice that the inner realm of a house is qualitatively different from the outer;

human beings make a distinction between value and activities taking place inside the house from those that occur outside. In other words, the Pir arriving at the door means it is the locus where the transformation of a disciple takes place. A transition happens where consciousness or light engulfs all aspects of a disciple's life.

The boy also recognizes the true nature and role of the spiritual master and totally submits to him. In this Ginan, Pir Shams makes a distinction amongst those who claim descent from the Prophet but do not legitimately possess the power, knowledge, and bliss that the Prophet has passed on to his progeny. Hence, only the legitimate heir of the Prophet can share esoteric knowledge and have the ability to revive the 'dead' soul. Pir Shams is establishing that only the Imam designated by the Prophet and his representative (the Pir) carries his light within them.

In ginans, the idea of murshid, Pir, or the Imam of the time holding the hands of the disciple is very important. It not only demonstrates the intimate relations between the Imam and/or Pir and the follower, murid, but it also indicates that the Imam's guidance and bliss accompanies the murid at all times.

In *Sakhī mārī ātam nā udhār,* Pir Sadr al-Din (1934, 3:53; 1969, 141) says,

Sakhī khālak khalakaṇa hār
Teṇe lai tāriya re,
Pīr Sadardīn pakaḍī bānha
Bhav sāgar utāriya re — 5

Oh friend, the Creator of all creations
Brings (the seeker) to the shore
Pir Sadr al-Din holding (the seeker's) arm
Helps (the seeker) cross the great ocean (of existence).

On the spiritual path, the Murshid holds the arm of the disciple to help her cross the ocean of existence, and journey through life. It is the grace from the Creator that enables a seeker on the path to cross the ocean of one's

uncertain life. However, in the world, it is the spiritual Master (Imam or Pir) who provides support to achieve the goal.

It is significant that the Pir uses the symbol of holding the arm rather than the hand. An interesting observation is relevant here that when a person is sick or has a disability that may cause the person to fall, the caregiver or medical practitioner holds the person's arm to give her maximum support and prevent the probable fall. It indicates the dependency on the guide and the guide holds onto the disciple tightly and intimately on the journey. No matter what conditions befall the disciple, the guide gets her/him through all trials and tribulations, and the Pir will not let go. The bond between Murshid and murid (the disciple) is solid and unbreakable.

Pirs often used the symbol of the ocean to describe human existence. The human soul is on this journey through the ocean. The metaphoric ocean indicates a long distance, the vast scope of possibilities, and the enormity of challenges. It may not be confined to life on earth alone. It could mean life before and after this life on earth in one's physical body. In other words, Muhammad's blessings and power of intercession carry a believer through life and continue in the hereafter until the Day of Judgment. In *Sāmī ne sāch,* Pir Sadr al-Din (1934, 3:143; 1969, 171) referring to the Prophet's power of intercession, states,

Eji Ek lākh ne chovīs hajār,
māṅhe paygambar sardār
Nabī Mahamad araj karse,
sāheb suṇo fariyād — *10*

Among 124 thousand apostles,
The Prophet is the leader
Prophet Muhammad pleads
Oh Lord, listen to our request

Pir Sadr al-Din establishes that Prophet Muhammad is the leader among all Prophets and the Prophet will plead to Allah for forgiveness on behalf of all humanity.

Kalimah **and Spiritual Transformation**

In Islamic mysticism, the *kalimah* or *shahādah* (*lā ilāha illa'llāh, muḥammadin rasūlu'llāh*; *there is no God but Allah and Muhammad is His Messenger*) plays a central role in the spiritual transformation of a seeker. *kalimah* (the word) or *shahādah* (witnessing), at a primary level, is the acceptance of the religion of Islam and entrance into the community. It also symbolizes entering the path and beginning the spiritual journey. Pir Shams Sabzawari, in the granth, *Man Samjānī* (1900), illustrates the significance of kalimah by stating,

Nabī Muḥammad kaheve Kalmā
pāk Rasūl kahe kalām
'Ali bina nahī dūja nām
kalma kunchi dil ma dharnā
nimāj jikar bandagi karnā
kalme vina mokh na pāve
bigar kalme dojakh jāve

Nabi Muhammad says the kalimah
The Holy Prophet says the scripture
Without Ali there is no name
Hold the kalimah in your heart
Perform prayers, dhikr, and worship
Without kalimah there is no salvation
Without kalimah, one goes to hell.

Hence, the *kalimah* occupies a central position in the spiritual search. In the ginan, *Kalma kahore momino*, Pir Satgur Nur (1934 3: 156-60; *Mahān 3*, 1950, 119-121) explains the transformative power of the *kalimah*. Pir contrasts the privileges of reciting the *kalimah* with not reciting, and the benefits of accepting the Prophethood of Muhammad with not accepting him. The transformation

begins as soon a person affirms that she/he is taking the journey on the path that the Prophet introduced. However, the conditions for this transformation to take place are that a person should recite the *kalimah* with earnestness, total devotion, and full consciousness. Satgur Nur (1934, 3:156) says,

Kalmā kaho re momano
tame mat jāo re bhūl
rāhā Alī Nabījī kī sāch hay
ye hovege sadā kabūl — 1

Recite the *Kalimah*, oh believers
Don't you forget ever
The path of Ali and Nabī is true
It is eternally endorsed.

Sadā means forever, always, eternally, hence indicating perpetuity, consistency, and constancy. *Qabūl* has multiple meanings as well. It means to be valid, authentic, accepted, endorsed, and approved. A Quranic equivalent to '*qabūl*' is *marḍiya*, (approved). In the Quran (19:55) Allah says, "Ismail (Ishmael) was approved by his Lord." Thus, his Lord was satisfied with Ismail (Izutsu, 1984, 110). Hence, the underlying message is that the path or the faith that the Prophet Muhammad and Ali have introduced you to is the authentic path, which is tested; therefore, its value and benefits are not temporary. Its authenticity has been verified time and again. Take this path with confidence and you will benefit from it.

Eji āl nabīū tamkuṅ bhejīyā
Is duniyā ke bīch
nimāj bandagi kalmāṅ hay
e hay nīamat chīj — 2 (1934, 3:156)

The progeny of the Prophet is sent to you
In the midst of this world
Prayers and meditation in this era
are gifts (from the Prophet).

Ni'āmat is from Arabic word *ni'am'* (*in'ām*) meaning reward and bounty. It is usually associated with the name of Allah or the Prophet that is, this reward or bounty comes from them. It is something bestowed upon human beings, not earned but given to them. Hence, in this verse, Pir Satgur Nur emphasizes that *ṣalāt (prayer)*, worship, and *'ibādat* are given to believers as gifts from Allah through the Prophet. In fact, the Prophet and his progeny being sent to the world are a mercy and reward, a prize – an invaluable gift – that cannot be earned but is given by Allah to humanity. Therefore, believers should value them and preserve the practice of *ṣalāt*, '*ibādat* and worship.

Eji Nabī to jīvuṅ kā dātār hay
jeṇe kalmā suṇāyā
je moman mānśe te beheśtī hoveṅge,
bākī gāphal bhūlā gemār — 3 (1934, 3:156)

Oh dear, the Prophet is the master of souls
Who bestowed the *kalimah*
The true believer who accepts him resides in heaven
The rest are heedless, have gone astray.

Hence, the Prophet is the caretaker of your souls. *Dātār* is equivalent to Arabic word *rabb*, meaning provider, caretaker, and protector. However, *rabb* or *dātār* is a much more encompassing term than just someone taking care of another. The Prophet gave us the *kalimah,* as the key or tool leading to heaven. Being the guardian and caretaker means that he creates the conditions, teaches his disciples knowledge, and passes on his wisdom to enable believers to get to heaven. However, disciples also have the responsibility to accept the Prophet and the *kalimah* to become eligible for the rewards of heaven. Hafiz expresses similar ideas beautifully in his *Divān-e. Ḥāfiẓ* (n.d. 120) saying,

Awqāt-e khush ān boodh ke ba doost baser shūde
Baqi hame beḥāṣlī wa bekhabrī boodh

The best times are those spent with the friend
The rest is futile and worthless

People who do not heed the message of the Prophet and/or do not accept it whole-heartedly have gone astray from the true path. The term *gāphal* is repeatedly used in various ginans. *Gāphal* means heedless and unconscious. An unconscious person is disconnected from the reality of his or her surroundings. That person's reality is constructed through the imagination in a dreamlike state. This reality is distinct, has limited scope or expansion, and separate from universal reality. In other words, the discourse of the unconscious mind manufactures its own reality, which limits a person's ability to connect with the experiences of others, and hinders a person's ability to experience universal truths.

Clifford Geertz (1973) has explained this phenomenon in sociological terms. Geertz (1973) states that a person operates in a cultural symbolic universe. Since symbols are culture specific, therefore, symbols have cultural specific meanings. Hence, this limits a person's ability to connect or communicate with people across cultures. This also takes away the ability to experience that, which is outside one's cultural sphere. Hence, when the Pir calls people *gāphal,* he is referring to a state of consciousness where intellectual abilities and spiritual sensitivities are confined to a limited set of experiences. A person believes that the totality of truth consists of his or her experiences and knowledge, and does not think of the possibilities that exist in this vast universe and infinite spiritual realm.

Eji heyt prīt man bhāvsuṅ
tame jampo Allah Rasūl
kalma kaho dil pāk suṅ
to kul vighan hove dūr — 4 (1934, 3:156)

With love and devotion of heart
Remember (repeat) the names of Allah and the messenger

Repeat the *kalimah* with a pure heart
Then all your miseries will vanish.

In this verse, Pir connects the role of *kalimah* or the faith of Islam to one's life. The Pir emphasizes that if you remember (*dhikr*) the names of Allah and his Rasūl with utter devotion and with a pure heart, then your difficulties will disappear or stay away from you. In other words, reciting the names of Allah and the Prophet not only give benefits in the afterlife, but will also assist the seeker in this world. Kalimah and names of Allah and Rasūl protect believers from difficulties and sorrow. Ginans often use terms *heyt* and *prīt* together to emphasize unconditional and total love for Allah, the Prophet and the Imams.

Eji bin kalme bandagi kare,
te to bandagi sūṅnī sār;
te jem nit utha rāhā chalaṇā,
ākhar ujaḍ vās — 5 (1934, 3:156)

One who meditates without the *kalimah*
That worship is futile
It is like taking the path without getting up (moving)
It is a sojourn in ruins.

In this verse, the Pir touches upon a doctrinal issue. He states that if a person does not recite *kalimah*, or in other words, does not accept the faith of Islam and the *Nubuwwah* of Prophet Muhammad, Allah does not accept that person's worship and servitude. Accepting Islam is essential for success in '*ibādat*. As such, worship and '*ibādāt* without the authentic spiritual guide is not possible. Hence, submission to the Prophet is a necessary condition for the spiritual journey. The Prophet is the guide, his message is the guidance, and without them, it is like being stagnant on the path and the person ends up being disappointed and spending life in futility.

Eji Alī Nabī kuṅ dhīyāiye
tame suṇo moman vāt

kalma kaho dil sāch sūṅ
nahī to ākhar kālī rāt — 6 (1934, 3:156-57)

Oh believer submit to Ali and the Prophet
Listen to our faith discourse
Recite the kalimah with true intent
Otherwise, it is the dark night at the end.

The art of listening is essential to the spiritual path in Islam. Listening to the Quran is an important act of faith. The Quran is called *samā'a*, that which is heard (Talbani, 2000). It is a very special act of devotion and worship. Therefore, we find that Pirs repeatedly mention that travelers (*Sālik*) should learn to listen to the Holy Quran, and the Prophet and Imams' messages (*Farman*). Their words have transformative qualities. Listening is a preparatory act of receiving knowledge. Listening to the *kalimah,* the words of the Prophet and Imams and the ginans of pirs entail receiving their *barakah* and bliss.

However, the Pir is also pointing to another form of listening; it is active and participatory listening. In this process, the listener is consciously receiving and appropriating knowledge and bliss into his/her soul. Externally, it appears to be a passive process but internally it is an active process. Hence, submitting to Muhammad and Ali is an act of absolute submission, devotion and "passivity," but internally, it is the most vibrant and energizing act that awakens a soul from deep slumber and transforms a potential soul or intellect into an active intellect. Listening to the Pir's discourse about the message and guidance of the Prophet is a way to decipher the clues to understanding the meaning and process of the Prophetic message.

Without the unfolding of inner wisdom, there is only the dark night, the night of ignorance. Pirs made it conditional that without true and conscious intent, the *kalimah* will not awaken and enlighten. Without it, one remains in the dark, the era of ignorance.

Eji Jis mukhe Kalma nahī kaheyā Nabī kā,
ane nahī kaheyā pukār
tene undhe mustak ṭāng śe
ane jayaśe dojak ke darbār — 7 (1934, 3:157)

One who does not say *kalimah* of the Prophet
And does not say it aloud (publicly)
That person will hang upside down
And go to hell's enclave.

The Pir expresses pity for people who do not have the consciousness to recite the kalimah or accept the Prophet. He describes two types of people. Those who do not accept the Prophet, they are in a piteous state since their mouth or tongue did not have an opportunity, bliss, or privilege to say the *kalimah*. The other type includes those who might have accepted it but remain pitiful since they do not say it publicly or consciously. Those people are likened to being hanged upside down or living life in a sorrowful state of agony.

In other places, the Pir cites the benefits of accepting the Prophet; here in this verse, he warns about the consequences of rejecting the prophetic message. For a believer or a searching soul, the consciousness that it has been separated from its origin, the divine source, is the most painful reality, equivalent to being in hell. Hence, the fire of hell is nothing but the agony of separation from the source. Jalal ad-Din Rumi (d. 1273) beautifully expresses this pain of separation from the divine in the opening verses of the *Mathnavi*.

Listen to the reed how it narrates a tale,
A tale of all the separations of which it complains.
Ever since they cut me from the reed-bed,
Men and women bemoaned my lament.

How I wish in separation, a bosom shred and shred,
So as to utter the description of the pain of longing.
Whoever becomes distanced from his roots,
Seeks to return to the days of his union.

This consciousness of pain comes from knowledge of the absence of divine grace and *barakah* in one's life. It is like wandering in the wilderness. After death, a person becomes conscious of what she/he is missing and realizes that in the world of actions (*dār al-ā'māl*) a human being is given the opportunity to seek the goal of nearness to the light of Allah and the Prophet. However, that blessing and *barakah* is lost due to ignorance and indulgence in material life and at the end of life, sorrow and regrets drown the human consciousness.

Eji Jis mukhe kalma nahī kaha Nabī kā
ane nahī jāṇīyo nām
tenā mukh māṅhe esā bhaṭhuṅ khayegā
tenuṅ dhojak māṅhe ṭhām — 8 (1934, 3:157)

The person that did not say the *kalimah* of the Prophet
And did not recognize the Name
Such a person will utter such words
That will make his/her abode in hell.

The Pir beautifully associates the *kalimah* with the Prophet in a personal way. The *kalimah* of the Prophet (*Kalma Nabī ka*) creates a personal bond between the reciter of the *kalimah* and the Prophet. It alludes to the fact that by reciting the *kalimah,* you possess something of the Prophet. It gives the reciter a unique and privileged position. In contrast, the person who does not recite the *kalimah* disassociates or is disconnected from the Prophet.

Further, the Pir connects the person who recites the *kalimah* with the sacred name, (*al-ism al-ā'ẓam*) and with the knowledge and recognition of the name. In general, in Islamic Sufi tariqahs, the name refers to the *al-ism al-ā'ẓam,* the most powerful and the greatest name of Allah given to a disciple for *dhikr* (to meditate upon). It is probable that the Pir is referring to the *al-ism al-ā'ẓam* that is given by the Prophet, Imam of the time, or a Sufi master to a disciple. Here in this verse, Pir connects the practice of reciting *kalimah* and remembering the greatest name

(*al-ism al-ā'ẓam*) with self-discipline, human actions, and their consequences. A person who engages in such spiritual practices develops behavioral traits that lead him/her to heaven. The Pirs uses negatives to show the consequences of not practicing the *kalimah* and thereby being unable to develop self-control. Hence, without spiritual practices, a person will lack self-control and would utter unsavory words that will inevitably make that person's abode in hell.

Eji Jeṇe kalma suṇīyā Nabī kā
ane kal māṅhe Nabī kabūl
tenā mukh māh aṁbarat barastā pāvegā
ane dhojakh-thi karsho dūr — 9 (1934, 3:157)

Oh! the one who hears the kalimah of the Prophet
And acknowledges the Prophet in his life
S/he will be showered with sweet blessed words
And will stay far from the hell.

In the above verse, the Pir juxtaposes the earlier argument. He states that a person who hears the *kalimah* and endorses the Prophet will speaks words that will keep hell away from him/her.

This is a reference not only to specific words but also to the *adab* associated with such speech. In Islamic cultures, *adab,* commonly translated as etiquette, does not just refer to speech and behavior, but also to a certain ethic of genteel kindness, generosity, goodwill, and wisdom. The term "*pāvegā*" means to discover and find; hence, she/he will discover himself/herself saying good, virtuous, and wise words. This means that the *kalimah* and the recognition of the Prophet lead to self-discovery and personal transformation of a person's behavior. There is an element of surprise about the self-discovery that is indicated in the verse. The person will discover inner qualities that were previously unknown or hidden from her/him.

Ambarat refers to pure water or the life affirming force. Water plays an important role in rituals and traditions in the Ismaili Tariqah tracing back to the Prophet and the first Imam Ali. The term "*barasta,*" meaning shower, alludes to the abundant flow of life affirming water. Hence, Pir indicates that such a person would utter life-affirming words that keep him/her away from pain and sufferings. This would not only apply to life in the hereafter but also a person's life in this world. She/he would be able to share the bliss with others since the act of speaking means conveying something to others. Hence, a person who recites the *kalimah* benefits from its *barakah* and would be able to share blessings with others and help improve the quality of life and environment around for all.

Eji nām Nabī kā mīṭhā hay
jesā sākar ne dūdh;
Kalma kaho dil sāch suṅ
to bāndho safāyat mūl — 10 (1934, 3:157)

Oh dear, the Prophet's name is sweet
Like milk with sugar
Recite the *kalimah* earnestly.
And thereby receive intercession (from the Prophet).

Pir Satgur Nur's style of poetry is formatted in such a way that often, in the first verse (two lines) he describes a concept enhanced with an adjective and in the second verse, he describe the affect or consequence. In this stanza, he states that the Prophet's name is sweet like sugar in milk. By using the discourse interpretation method within the context of *ta'wīl,* we can interpret that the sacred name, *ism-e-ā'ẓam,* is a conduit to bring a seeker to the beatific spiritual experience and knowledge (gnosis).

In *ta'wīlī* literature, Nasir Khusraw has interpreted milk as the symbol for esoteric knowledge. The sweetness of sugar completely melts in milk without any separation in taste and delivers the direct experience of happiness. Pir Sadr al-Din compared sugar with patience and milk with

truth. Both of these qualities are nurtured on the spiritual path. On occasions of celebration and happiness, the community shares sweet milk and sweets made of milk and sugar. These practices are prevalent in various communities in the Indian subcontinent. Hence, sweetness symbolizes beatific experiences that bring spiritual happiness and contentment.

In the second couplet, Pir further elaborates that if *kalimah* is recited with earnestness, it will bring about the intercession of the Prophet. In other words, *dhikr* of the great name (*ism-e-ā'ẓam*) and *kalimah* bring healing to the human soul. Medieval Ismaili literature, such as the writings by Sijistani, suggest that disease is caused by an imbalance in human nature (*ṭabī'i*), which in turn is caused by indulgence in material pleasures and transgressions. Hence, the power of the name of the Prophet is such that it heals disease, restores the soul's natural balance and returns it to a state of happiness and contentment.

Eji Kalma kahore momano
ma karo jug kī kāṅṇ
nahī to ekdam uṭhī jaoge
ane dojak javoge parmāṇ — 11 (1934, 3:157)

Oh believer, recite the kalimah
Don't pay heed to the world
Otherwise, you'll wake up one day
And inevitably go to hell.

This verse emphasizes the importance of reciting the *kalimah* to refrain from being entrapped by the worldly attractions. The idea of sudden departure has an element of surprise. This idea applies to a person who is engrossed in his/her worldly affairs and time passes by; one day that person finds herself/himself facing the end of the life and she/he is taken by surprise. It is a surprise for this person because he/she never contemplated the idea that one day this life will end. Since the person is unprepared for the hereafter following death, this could be an unnerving

situation, and fear, helplessness, and powerlessness could take over. Even a person with great deal of wealth and power in life is unable to control his/her circumstances, and this constitutes the hell of ignorance and fear.

On the other hand, a person who meditates on the great name is prepared for the life in the hereafter and awaits such a moment. Preparedness (*isti'dād*), as a mystical concept, is also tied with being in a constant state of meditation and ready to receive the *barakah*. Therefore, she/he is not surprised when death approaches.

Eji pāṅch vīkhīya man vasha karo
tame moman dil rākho māṭh
Kalma kahe dil sāch suṅ
to dojakh hove harām — 12 (1934, 3:157-58)

Oh believer, control your five impulses
And silence your heart's desires
Recite the *kalimah* with a sincere heart
Then hell would be forbidden to you.

In the above verse, the Pir suggests that recitation of *kalimah* will help us control the five senses. The five senses enhance the human connection with the world and are the cause of human desires. Human desires, in turn, instigate a mind to wander around and do not allow concentration on the word. The recitation of the *kalimah* will facilitate a mind at rest.

The Pir uses negative yet strong imagery to draw attention to the power that the *kalimah* has to protect a believer from hell. He uses the expression that 'hell will be forbidden to you." The Arabic word "*ḥarām*" means protected and excluded. In this sense, the *kalimah* provides a protection, a shield, or a force field that keeps harm away from the seeker.

Eji Moman dil me karo bandagī,
to phal Allāh, Alī Nabī kā pāo;
kalame kuṅjī le kar tamārī,
dilnā tālā kholī juo — 13 (1934, 3:158)

Oh believer meditate in your heart
Then receive your reward from Allah, Ali and Nabī
Take your key of the *kalimah*
And open the lock of your heart.

The literal translation of the first line would that "Oh dear believers, meditate (do your *dhikr*) in your heart," refers to "*dhikr-e khafī*" (covert/silent *dhikr*). In this form of *'ibādat* the word, *al-ism al-ā'ẓam,* is repeated without verbalizing the "word" (uttering with tongue) by focusing on the word in the mind. This form of *dhikr* contrasts with *dhikr-e jallī* (the word is repeated loudly and often as a form of group meditation). In the oft recited verses "Sat Sabad hai Guru Hamāra" (1905, 27-28) from the *Brahma Prakash* granth, Pir Shams says,

Sat sabad kā karo vichārā,
Pīr shāh kaho ji vāram vārā— 2
pratham dhyān rasanā suṅ kije,
nishadin pīr shāh pīr shāh bhaṇije — 3
Tin mās rasanā vich rahiā,
piche nām brahama so kahiyā— 4
Nām letā bhaiā prem prakāshā,
tab upajiā man visvāsā. — 5
Kaho prem lakhash ke sāre bhāi,
gupat bhed kahuṅ pragaṭ batāi — 6
Gada gad laherī prema kī uṭhe,
tāṅ vich shiri mukh kī chuṭe— 7

Meditate on the true word,
Say 'Pir Shah,' at every moment
First, concentrate by repeating,
Constantly saying Pir Shah all day

After repeating for three months with the tongue,
The word then reverberates in your consciousness
When saying the word, light breaks out,
Certainty sprouts from the inner self
Oh brother, how is the experience of love?
I am revealing the hidden secret

Each and every sense has overwhelming happiness,
And the neophyte state is discarded

It means that when a sālik is on the spiritual path, she or he reaches the stage where she/he does not repeat the word with the tongue but the word reaches the soul and it continuously reverberates inside.

In this ginan, Pir Shams guides the seeker through the various stages of meditation starting from external recitation to a complete internalization leading to the beatific experience. Ibn al-Arabi considers this as the highest state of *dhikr* (remembrance) in which a person is fully submerged into the *dhikr* and becomes "internally unified with the Absolute" (Izutsu 1984, 250). It is likely the same stage where *dhikr* is constant in the soul, as expressed in the above ginans. At that point, the *sālik* receives *barakah* from Allah, his Prophet and Hazrat Ali, who take the traveler under their wings. *Kalimah* is the key that opens the locked heart. The Pir uses the word "Juo" seeing or witnessing. We witness the unlocking of our soul through '*ibādat* and the hidden treasure appears.

In the ghaṭ pāt Ginan, *Pāṭ manḍāvī ne chok purāvo,* Pir Sadr al-Din (1969, 28) said, *Sarveṇe suṇīyā te meṅ nayaṇe su diṭhā* (Everyone has heard of it, I have seen it with my [own] eyes) alluding to the same transformative experience by which a seeker advances from listening to witnessing. This witnessing opens up the inner recess of the human soul.

Eji man nirmal karī srev-jo
ane hardam liyo Allah Rasūl kā nām
moman kuṅ Kalma mithā lāge
jesā lobhī kuṅ hay mithā dām — 14 (1934, 3:158)

Oh Dear, serve with a cleansed heart
And constantly recite the name of Allah and his Messenger
A believer loves the *kalimah*
Like a greedy person loves the business of the world.

In Sanskrit, *nirmal* or *nirmalta* means pure, cleansed and innocent. Innocence from the Old French means "freedom from guilt; purity, and chastity." Hence, the meaning of *"man nirmal karī"* means the self is freed from guilt, and it is restored to its original state of total detachment. *Man* is the inner self and it is the site where the enduring imprints of human actions, thoughts, and intents are registered. The spiritual journey is one to One; hence, a person needs to shake off emotional, psychological, and psychic burdens and fully focus on the one object of the quest.

The term *srev-jo* means serving and worshiping and refers to the disposition and attitude of being servant to the master. It is not acts of rendering service but is being in a state of perpetual service. It is close to the word *'abd* referred to in the Holy Quran, where Allah referring to the Prophet's ascent to heaven stated that "Exalted is He who took His Servant (*'abd*) by night from al-Masjid al-Ḥaram to al-Masjid al-Aqṣā, whose surroundings We have blessed, to show him of Our signs. Indeed, He is the Hearing, the Seeing" (al-Isra' 17:1). Or in the same Surah, it was used for Noah, stating that "he was a grateful servant" (17:3). Hence, *'abd* is used with people of great stature in front of Allah, and Prophet Muhammad's status shows his intimacy with Allah. In these verses, the Pir describes three components of becoming a servant,

1) being detached and free from the baggage that we carry inside us,

2) being constant in remembrance of the sacred name, and

3) being totally devoted to the Prophet and Allah, being their true '*abd.*

Further, Pir Sat Gur Nur gives an example that just as a worldly person is fully preoccupied with worldly business, similarly, a seeker is fully committed to the meditation of the name. Pir Sat Gur Nur uses irony to

convey contrasting meanings or to implore a seeker to have similar commitment to the spiritual path as much as she/he might be concerned with worldly matters as a businessperson.

Eji Moman Kalma kaho dil sāch suṅ
ane jhūṭ bāji choḍo
māyā suṅ man dūr karo
tame heyt prīt sāhebjī suṅ rākho — 15 (1934, 3:158)

Oh believer, recite the *kalimah* with a truthful heart
And quit deceiving (lying) games
Remove *māyā* (worldly illusion) from your heart
Keep your love with the beloved Master.

The Pir alerts believers to recite the *kalimah* with earnestness. In the earlier verse, the Pir says to recite the *kalimah* with a pure heart, implying that once you accept the *kalimah*, you must remove doubts and material attachments. Then a person is able to advance to the next stage where the person recites the *kalimah* with truth in the heart, implying that a believer should experience the truth of the word and stop deceiving themselves and others. This is not the journey where cunningness would help. A person should be truthful and honest to him or herself. If person is deceitful, it will harm only her/himself.

On this path, *māyā* must be removed from the heart. The term *māyā* is extensively used in ginans. Often it is misinterpreted as the world being an illusion. Ananda Coomaraswamy, explains, "Maya may be called Moha, delusion or illusion, that by which the World is deluded (mohita)" (n.d., 75-76). It is a condition of human mind that perceives the world in a manner that is illusionary. The world is not an illusion but the mind's knowledge of it is misleading and misperceived. Hence, removing *māyā* and achieving purity means removing illusions and misinformation regarding a person's relationship with the world and her/his accumulation of socially constructed knowledge about the world, her/his role in the world, and

responsibilities and actions in the world. Therefore, the meaning of purity implies exclusive and unconditional love based on an unadulterated knowledge of the truth and one's relationship with the Spiritual Master. A person cannot play games of deceptions to accumulate wealth, indulge in worldly affairs, and think that s/he could also win in the spiritual realm.

Eji Kalma kahore momano
tame mat rākho vīkh
nahī to kālaj bhāvarā
nahī to ā kuḍī duniyā māṅ tīṅgāvsho nīt — 16 (1934, 3:158)

Oh believer, recite the *kalimah*
And don't you have any grudge
Otherwise tomorrow oh enchanted one
You'll surely be hung [up] In this fake world,

It is a human tendency to linger on to negativity. The Pir warns the seeker to not hold on to resentment and grudges and to let go and release herself from negative thoughts or feelings against others.

In this fake world, everything is ultimately lost. Pir uses the word '*bhāvara'*, which means obsessed or mad. Its implied meaning is also being possessed. Hence, a 'crazy' preoccupation with the world has two consequences: On the one hand, the human subject can be over indulgent in worldly matters or have an excessive investment of self in the object of attraction i.e., the world. This is an irrational relationship in which the person becomes indifferent or loses sight of his/her compulsion and loses judgment about the profit or loss in the relationship. On the other hand, being 'possessed' indicates a relationship in which the human subject loses discretionary judgment and gives in personal power and decision making to an external force. An external power controls a person's faculties and the person could act or

behave against self-interest in a manner, which causes him or her harm.

In both cases, the person acts irrationally and demonstrates a lack of self-control and self-awareness about personal interest and the value of the object he/she is obsessed with. Hence, obsession with worldly business results in loss because owning a piece of the world is an illusion.

The Pir suggests methods by which a person could reverse or change his/her destiny and future results. It is by unlearning habits and old ways that are detrimental to intellectual and spiritual advancements, which brought a person to this losing wager or game. One is able to recover by relearning new knowledge, new ways of learning, and living an inspired, spiritual life.

The Pir gives two simple methods to relearn new knowledge and habits, which reengineer the outer world and immediate environment that are nontoxic and transform the consciousness. These two methods are making an honest living and *dhikr*. These two ways manage the inner and outer worlds and enable a person to achieve their goals and live a life of full consciousness.

Eji Karṇī ete raheṇī hoie
ane haq kī roṭī khāie
bhāi tab rojā nimāj kabūl hove

Ane beheśt maṅhe jāie bhāi — 17 (1934, 3:158)

Your deeds will stay with you
And earn your living honestly
Then your fasting and prayers will be accepted
Oh brother, you'll go to heaven.

Pir Sat Gur alerts his followers that only your deeds will remain, therefore earn your living honestly. The Pir emphasizes that earning honestly is the key to human deeds being performed with truthfulness, because that is where most people default and transgress ethical boundaries. 'Earn your living honestly' in reality is not a

single activity but is a collection of complex activities and decision-making that takes up a large portion of the day. Therefore, correcting the activity of earning one's living would create a chain reaction of correcting a series of activities and decisions that would transform a person's thinking and behavior. Charles Duhigg's (2012) book *Power of Habit: Why we do what we do in life and business* demonstrates that a person could transform one's life by changing a single habit or changing the way a person does a routine task; this one change would create a chain reaction that would transform one's life. Hence, the Pir's advice of earning one's living honestly changes a lot of things in a person's life.

However, by saying that "only your actions will remain with you," the Pir does not mean that they will stay in a person's soul or consciousness as an appendix or attachment. Human actions shape human consciousness. Hence, changes that come with habits, repeated actions, or deeds mold the human soul or consciousness. This engraving on human consciousness is long-term. It becomes the person.

Hence, to reverse the work of *karma*, a person needs to unlearn habits that caused him/her to transgress and relearn practices that bring about positive changes in consciousness. In the folklore of Sindh, especially among the Ismailis of Sindh, it is believed that the manner in which people earn their living affects the moral compass of a person and family that is transmitted to progeny. If daily living is earned through *ḥalāl* (approved) means, it will have positive impact on the family. And if it is earned through *ḥarām* (unapproved) means, it will negatively affect the person who makes the earning (such as head of the family) but also in a *karmic* way, it will affect the family and kin who benefit from it. Living earned in unprescribed ways could develop traits that would be harmful for spiritual growth and advancement. Acceptance of fasting and prayers are conditional upon having deeds

that are in harmony with a person's spiritual growth. It is a self-evaluating process. A person can decipher for himself or herself whether her or his actions contribute to his or her spiritual development or not.

Eji Kalme suṅ kapṭī ne pānch vaś nahī
ane kuḍī najare joye
kalme taṇī kīṅmat murakh na buje
te kem karī beheśtī hoye — 18 (1934, 3:158-59)

One who disconnects from the *kalimah* and does not control five impulses
And sees with an evil eye
Such a moron does not discover the value of *kalimah*
Then how could she/he go to heaven?

Knowing and discovering the value of the *kalimah* is the route to heaven. Values mean power, stature, usefulness, excellence, and application. It represents the worth that the *kalimah* brings to a person's physical and spiritual life.

Muslims often believe that there is a profound connection between the physical and spiritual domains of human lives. However, it is not similar to the way that political activists who believe that religion should influence all state and social institutional change. It is not outside change that transforms the inner life of soul. Mystics always believed that personal inner change that takes place through spiritual practices could lead to change in the outside world. Developing moral and spiritual consciousness enables people to make decisions with an expanded knowledge base and deeper consciousness about life on earth. Politics and political enforcement of ethical and spiritual values never were and never will be instruments of ethical or spiritual change in a person. It is individual choice and personal commitment to spiritual goals that brings about inner change. The *kalimah* gives a practitioner the ability and power to excel and raise his or her spiritual and social stature. Hence, the worth of knowing, understanding, and discovering the inner power

of the *kalimah* enhances a person's quality of life physically and spiritually.

Eji Kalame taṇī kīṅmat jo bujīye
to Allāh, Nabī dhiyādiye joye
man kuṅ māre ho rahīye
to sahī beheśtī hoīe — 19 (1934, 3:159)

One who knows the value of the *kalimah*
S/he submits to Allah and the Prophet consciously
S/he kills the ego (*nafs*)
Such a person truly belongs to heaven.

A person who discovers the value of the *kalimah* achieves self-realization and submits to Allah and His Messenger with direct knowledge and witnessing. How does one determine the value of an idea, action, or a product? Alternatively, what determines the value of the *kalimah* in one's life? A person judges value by its impact on life, society, or societal demands. Value manifests in the form of physical, intellectual, and spiritual nourishment and exhibits its transformative effect on life.

A person who discovers the values of the *kalimah* and consciously submits to Allah and his Rasūl develops the capacity of self-control and discipline. The Pir connects the value and understanding of the *kalimah* to conscious submission to Allah and His Rasūl, which raises the human consciousness to a level where it witnesses Allah and Rasūl. Hence, having knowledge of the *kalimah* and control over *nafs* (carnal self/libido) are preconditions to get closer to Allah.

Eji dhan te deś Nabī kā
anē jeṇe najare suṇ dīṭhā
jis saṅphadhame nabīji beṭhā
te sab beheśht me jaye bhāi — 20 (1934, 3:159)

Fortunate are those servants of the Prophet
Whose eyes saw him
With whose gathering the Prophet sat

Oh brother! All those go to heaven.

The Pir proclaims that people who saw the Prophet are fortunate and their families are fortunate because they will go to heaven. The word seeing is equivalent to the Persian word *dīdār* (beatific vision). *Dīdār* (dēd+dār) literarily means one who has eyes. The act of seeing with eyes places importance of having those inner eyes that enable a *sālik* to see the truth or have the ability to behold the vision. Sufis and Ismailis would question whether all people who lived during the time of the Prophet were eligible for heaven. Hence, Pir Satgur qualifies his statement by saying "*dās Nabī ka*," the servant of the Prophet. Hence, a person who devotedly serves the Prophet would receive *dīdār* of the Prophet. In the Ismaili Tariqah, membership does not give undeserved benefits; a person still has to strive to earn and qualify for such a vision. *Dīdār* is a profound experience; it transforms the seer. Hafiz states,

Har ganj-e sa'adat ke khudā dādī Hāfiz
Az yuman-e dua-e shab wa werd-e sahari bood

All the treasure of fortune that God gave to Hafiz
Is due to the prayers at night and dhikr of early morning

In the Ismaili tradition, it is reported that one who receives the transforming vision could transmit that bliss and wisdom to his/her progeny. Hence, physically seeing Prophet must be accompanied with the transformative effect through the spiritual vision.

Eji Jis sabha māṅhe Nabīji beṭhā
ane Kalma kahi suṇāyā
te moman upar huṅ balahārī
jeṇe dīdār Nabī kā pāyā — 21 (1934, 3:159)

Oh Dear, the place where the beloved Prophet sat
And he recited the *kalimah* to the listeners
I would sacrifice myself for that believer
Who received the vision (*dīdār*) of the Prophet!

The Prophet's *dīdār* is a unique and rare experience that a seeker could have in a lifetime. The prophet sat with his followers and gave them the 'word' and some, through practice and asceticism, reached the stage where they were ready to receive the Prophet's vision (*dīdār*). Hence, *dīdār* of the prophet means having the inner eyes or profound insight to receive the Prophet's spiritual vision. A seeker submerges in the *nūr* of the Prophet in a life changing experience. It could be a momentary experience but it brings about enduring transformation that often could last as long as a person lives. This is a primary reason that *aṣḥāb* (companions) of the Prophets are regarded in high esteem. Although we can never know which companions had this type of powerful experience, historical narratives indicate that companions such as Salman al-Farsi, Bilal, Ghulam Qambar, Abu Dhar Ghafari, and several others had such unique relationships with the Prophet.

Eji dhan te māt pitā kuṅ
ane dhan te kuṭuṁb parīvār
jeṇe Nabī kuṅ dekhīyā
te beheśt maṅhe jaye bhāi — 22 (1934, 3:159)

Glad tidings to those parents
And glad tidings to the family and clan
Those who saw the Prophet
They go to heaven, oh brother.

The Pir offers good news to parents, families, and clans of people who were fortunate to see the Prophet. In the faith community, even seeing the Prophet with physical eyes was a gift from Allah. Those who accept the Prophet as the messenger of Allah, who conveyed to them the most sacred and powerful book and divine names, would receive spiritual gifts from Allah. However, those who merely accepted him as a successful Arab politician and a warrior may not. The spiritual encounter with the Prophet would light up the inner spark in the consciousness of his intimate companions.

Dīdār is aspirational too. It gives a seeker the goal to aspire and strive for in life. Those who are on the path seek the *dīdār* of the Prophetic light, and those who have had this experience seek to revisit it. They receive the bliss that can inspire and enrich the spirits of others, who came into contact with them. Given the depth of love and devotion that Muslims have for the Prophet, for them 'seeing' the Prophet is worth anything in the world. He is the bliss and divine gift given to humanity. Faith and devotion are not measurable and an outside agency cannot judge it. It is between the believer and the Creator. The very idea that Allah knows everything and the Prophet has purview to His knowledge means that whatever a true believer (*Momin*) has in his or her mind is not hidden from the Creator. This builds a unique, private, and exclusive relationship between a *Momin* and the Creator. In this case, the *Momin* is a person who has achieved the state of peace and serenity and has received the bliss that solidifies his/her relationship with the eternal.

> *Eji Kalma kaho Rasūl kā*
> *je sab kāṭe pāp ne vīkh*
> *paṇ sab jug phanā hoveṅge*
> *bākī rahēṅge khudā Rasūl* — 23 (1934, 3:159)
>
> Oh dear, say the *kalimah* of the Messenger
> That annihilates all transgressions and grudges
> The entire world will vanish
> Only Allah and the messenger will remain.

The Pir says that if you recite the *Kalimah* of the Messenger, it will annihilate all your transgressions and grudges. Transgressions and grudges are human personality traits, since people can change them. Such actions are the result of imbalance and extremes within human personalities; the recitation of *kalimah* restores such balance and removes transgression. Sijistani (1961) mentions earlier that the Prophet receives bliss from the celestial world because of his balanced nature and perfect

intellect. Hence, the purpose of prophetic teaching is to restore a balance in human beings enabling them to travel on the path to perfect the intellect.

The verse about the annihilation of the era (*yug*) refers to the notion that time (*yug* or *zamān*) vanishes - only Allah and his messenger will remain. In Sufi terminology, *fanā'* is a continuous process that we experience every passing moment. Only *baqā'*, survival is within the light of Allah and Muhammad. The annihilation of *yug* refers to the disappearance of an individual lifetime. When this lifetime ends, eternal life remains as part of the eternal reality. Hence, *fanā'* of the *yug* does not mean the end of the world or the end of the collective era but it simply means that a person's life span ends and it totally erases a person's mark on earth; there may be a little reminiscence for a short period of time in the memory of a few. Eventually, everything about that person disappears.

Eji Jis mukhe Kalma nahī kahā Nabī kā
anē nahī jāṇīyo nām
tenā mukh māṅhe gāro loho āg-kā
tenu dojak maṅhe ṭhām — 24 (1934, 3:159-60)

The tongue that doesn't recite the *kalimah* of the Prophet
And doesn't know the (sacred) word
His/her mouth will be (filled) with molten iron
His/her place will be in the hell.

Eji Jis mukhe Kalma nahī kaha nabī kā
ane tīs mukhe letī āg
Kalame suṅ je beheśtī hoiye
to phal pāvē darudhā safāyat — 25 (1934, 3:160)

The tongue that doesn't say the *kalimah* of the Prophet
That mouth carries fire
The one who goes to heaven by reciting *kalimah*
Receives the reward of intercession (from the Prophet).

This reward is like receiving blessings (*barakah*) through *darūd* - a popular payer recited for the Prophet by all Muslims. The *darūd* or *ṣalawāt* is "Oh Allah, shower your blessings upon Muhammad and his Progeny" (*Allah humma ṣalli Allah, Muhammadan wa Alē Muhammad*). This prayer gives solace to believers in difficult times, in sickness and when faced with hurdles on the spiritual path. In this context, the *kalimah* also offers similar benefits of peace and serenity for believers. Pir Shams in *Man Samjānī* (1900) states,

Nabī utāre pār re

The Prophet takes you to salvation

Hence, the Prophet is the guide and source for self-realization. Through him, a seeker crosses the ocean of existence and achieves salvation.

Sat Gur Nūr further explains;

Eji āgal jatā kem bhavsāgar ādaro
ebhi jug māhe jūṭhī vāt
jenā mukh māṅ Kalma nahī
tene āgal āg saṅgāthī — 26 (1934, 3:160)

Moving forward how can you cross the ocean?
This world is an illusionary path
In whose visage there is no *kalimah*
His/her companion ahead will be the fire (of hell).

It refers to the dream-like state that the world creates for people. Many people go through life without being fully conscious of their journey. When they exhaust their time on earth and at the time of departure, they remain totally unaware about the journey they need to undertake.

The Pir poses the questions: while taking journey ahead how will you cross the mighty ocean? This world is a false path; how would you escape from its illusionary games? The Pir is identifying the difficulties one could face on the journey of life. The very question that how

would you cross the ocean raises several other questions. Imagine an ocean in front of you; what resources would you need to cross it? How would you do it? It implies methods; who will guide you? What kind of eventualities would you face? These questions are compressed in Persian Sufi literature as *zād–e rah* (provisions for the journey). In Islamic art and literature, the family of the Prophet (*ahl al bayt*) is portrayed as a ship that would take believers across the ocean of life.

The word "*jūṭhī* literally means false or fake, but it does not mean that the world itself is an illusion or unreal, rather it is what one accumulates in terms of power, wealth, or self-grandeur that are illusionary. They have no long-term benefits and eventually a person is going to lose all of it. Hence, time is the most powerful tool to hammer in sense into the most powerful and opulent. A person cannot take anything with him or her except the consequences of one's actions that are imprinted into human consciousness. These worldly affairs and attractions are illusions because they do not seem to be as they appear. Their covert role in human life is to conceal (veil) the truth from humans.

Eji moman murakh na hoie
em bolīyā Pīr Satgur Nūr
kalma kahore Rasūl kā
to dekho Nūr-e Nūr hajūr — 29 (1934, 3:160)

Oh believer, don't be a moron
Pir Satgur Nur says
Recite the *kalimah* of the Messenger
And witness and dwell in the presence of light.

Pir Satgur Nur defines the quality of a true believer, a *momin*. A *momin* is a person who is fully aware and conscious, not a moron (*murakh;* heedless). Hence, the true *Momin*, one who has achieved ultimate peace, is the person who is knowledgeable and self-aware and his or her faith is based on the direct experience and knowledge of

the truth, no matter how minuscule that experience or knowledge is. It is not borrowed or from hearsay. The *momin*'s goal is to have the direct vision of the Unified Truth. The method to attain it is through the remembrance (*dhikr*) of Allah and His messenger. In this verse, the Pir gives two results of *dhikr,* that are having *dīdār* or vision of the *Nūr,* and remaining in that illuminating presence. Pir Shams Sabzawari in the granth, *Man Samjānī* (1900), beautifully states,

Rasūl Allāh tab sāmu jove
man kī murādā purī hove

When the Messenger looks straight (at a believer)
All the heart's desires are fulfilled

When the Prophets looks at a *momin*, his gaze fulfills the true believer's desires. The Prophet's gaze has bliss that transforms a believer's fortunes, both spiritual and material.

In the Presence of the Prophet

Sayyida Imam Begum also known as Bibi Tahira (d. ca 1866), one of the only two female ginan writers[1], has a unique way of describing the status of the Prophet and Ali. Her ginans primarily focus on the spiritual search and the human condition in the world. Her short ginan, "*Sat gur milīya mune āj* (*Today I met the True Master*) (1903, 127-28) describes her experiences of meeting the spiritual master. The ginan beautifully narrates the various experiences and visions that she attains by being in the presence of the spiritual guide. She states,

Today I met the True Master

[1] Bai Budhai is another female ginan writer, who is reported to be the daughter of Pir Hasan Kabir al-Din and sister of Sayyid Imam Shah. The ginan that is attributed to her *Imam Shah athwa Bai Budhai no samvad*, appears to be a dialogue on ethics between sister and brother.

I received eternal peace
When I found the true master, my sorrow vanished
This servant's tasks were all accomplished
When I received the vision, my heart achieved peace
I received the reign of the sublime state
What is the sublime state? It is a unique narrative
Not many know such an undertaking
The one who knows, attains the ninth realm (heaven)
And witnesses the highest King in all places
Everywhere I see Him, I recognize the One
It is the Perfect Lord's reign
Imam Begum states: Listen carefully my brethren
Ali and Nabi are the crowns (Imam Begum, 1932, 4: 172-173).

Imam Begum encapsulates all her spiritual experiences in one sentence that Prophet Muhammad and Ali are the epitome of all spiritual experiences.

Bibi (a term of endearment and respect) Imam Begum first recalls the benefits of having met the Spiritual Master. Being in the presence of the Spiritual Master and receiving the blessing of his vision instantly brings serenity and contentment to the person. The vision removes all sorrows and grief from one's heart and assists the *Momin* in accomplishing unfinished tasks. This indicates that human beings face a number of problems in the world and have difficulty in completing their tasks and meeting their goals. However, the vision (*dīdār*) gives one the ability to accomplish one's goals in life and tasks that were undone. It means the difficulties from one's path are removed and the person advances in achieving his/her goals. The immediate impact of the vision is that human consciousness achieves freedom from wants and needs and is liberated from sorrows and preoccupation with worldly affairs. The freedom from want allows a person to advance on the spiritual journey. The vision raises human

consciousness (soul) to a higher level of existence. This transformative experience is unique and difficult to describe. Imam Begum states that one witnesses the divine presence everywhere and although the divine presence is mirrored in everything and everywhere, yet it is a vision of the unity of the One. It is an experience of singular unity reflected in multiplicity.

In the last verse, Imam Begum lets people into her secret. She calls out to her brothers and sisters in faith: I am telling you a secret, therefore, pay attention. The core message or essence of the highest spiritual vision is that Ali and Nabī are the crown, the epitome of the divine unity. She proclaims that Ali and Nabī are the reflection of the divine unity and they are the core and essence of all spiritual visions and experiences. It appears that this emotionally charged and beautifully sung ginan creates ecstasy for the reciter and she in her ecstasy exclaims that Ali and Nabī are the reflection of highest reality and the vision of them is the experience of the Truth.

Prophet Muhammad and the Signs of Qiyāmah

Traditions report that the Prophet was often concerned about the end of the era, *qiyāmah*. The Holy Quran has several passages describing the events of *qiyāmah*. Although the Holy Quran does not give specific times, it does mention several signs leading to the Day of Judgment. It is also referred to as 'the hour' - the ultimate time - the hour that will transform all living things. Fazlur Rahman, explaining Surah 50:22, states, "The Hour when every human will be shaken into a unique and unprecedented self-awareness of his deeds; he will squarely and starkly face his own doings, not-doings, and mis-doings and accept the judgment upon them" (Rahman, 2009, 106).

The Prophet was aware of the difficult times that would befall upon the *Ummah*. Traditions report that he expressed his concerns about the plight of the community.

The Prophet is reported to have said that in his time believers who do not practice 1/10th of their obligations would go to hell, but there will be a time when believers who practice 1/10th of their obligations would go to heaven, because it will be very difficult to practice the faith in that era (Ameer Ali, 1997, 183).

Ismaili Pirs were also preoccupied with matters of spiritual nature and the plight of the human soul in this transitory world. They convey the sense of urgency and difficulties involved in undertaking the journey. For them, *Kal Yug* is the last and most difficult period in the cyclical history in which there is a great deal of corruption and ethical lapses. Hence, material needs and pleasures take over and human beings forget about their spiritual needs.

The holy Prophet worried as to how his followers would fare when the end will come. Pir Shams Sabzawari expresses this declining awareness and sensitivity to the spiritual search. He narrates a meeting between the Prophet and Angel Gabriel. The Prophet asked the archangel to describe the signs of the approaching Judgment Day. The ginan narrates, "Listen, listen, oh believers, Listen and pay heed" (*Suno suno momino, suni man lavana,* (1934 2:169-72; 1952, 38-39). Prophet Muhammad asks Angel Gabriel (the harbinger of the message), Will Angel Gabriel ever return to earth after Muhammad has passed away (since, he is the last Prophet)? The angel tells Prophet Muhammad that he will return to the world ten times after him.

1. The first time he will come to take away prosperity (*barakat*) from the world.
2. The second time he would return to the world to take away love (*mohabat*) from the world.
3. The third time he would come back to take away mercy *(rehmat).*

4. The fourth time he would return to the world to take away modesty (*sharam*) from men and women and vulgarity will prevail.
5. The fifth time he would come and take away generosity (*sakhāvat*) from the rich.
6. The sixth time he would return to the world he would take away faith. A few faithful would be left in the world, and people would live faithless lives.
7. The seventh time he would come to the world and take away promises and rulers would not fulfill their promises.
8. The eight time he would return and take away justice and rulers would be unjust.
9. The ninth time he would return and take away patience from the world.
10. The tenth time the Angel would return and lift away the Holy Quran from the world, then nothing would be left.

The last action of the Angel is a hair-raising event when he takes away the Quran. For Muslims, the Holy Quran is the *kalimah*, the primordial word, that created the world and created life, gave knowledge to Adam, bringing spiritual awakening to dormant souls. Its taking away from the world means the end to the world.

The Holy Quran is a microcosm of human intellectual, spiritual, cultural history and the power beneath the community's worldly and spiritual foundation; lifting it from the world means that chaos and calamities would envelope the community. Without the Quran, the community would be deprived of the umbrella of grace that protects it. Pir Shams goes on to describe additional signs of End Times, stating,

Ālam koi bujhe nāhiṅ, sab jāhel ho jāve ji
ilam kuṅ koi bujhe nāhiṅ, sab libās kapaḍe pahechāne ji

reshamī kapaḍe pahen-kar āve, use khudā kar māne ji 12 (1934 3:169-72; *Mahān 2,* 39)

No one will recognize the learned; all will become ignorant,
No one will seek knowledge,
Everyone will recognize clothes and robes,
Those who are donned in silk,
People will accept them as gods.

The major sign of the mighty calamity (*al-Qiyāmah*) is ignorance. Very few will know the inner or esoteric meaning of the Book. People will not recognize true scholars grounded in esoteric and spiritual knowledge but those who wear expensive cloths will become the interpreters of the faith and the Book. Hafiz laments the same fact that the value of true scholars will diminish. Hafiz (n.d. 192) says,

Az hashamat ahl-e jahal bekewan rasidaand
Juze ah ahl-e fazal bekewan namerassed

People with wealth have reached the seventh heaven
And only a scholar's sigh reaches there.

This verse alludes to the strong link between wealth and the power of interpretation, production, and distribution of knowledge. People with wealth and power will control and manage the knowledge discourse. Interpretations of scriptures and religion will be devoid of the search for truth and a large segment of believers will not pursue their spiritual destiny. However, religious knowledge will be used to establish power and control in society.

In the ginanic verse cited above, the use of the term '*khudā*' is very significant. *Khudā* has dual meanings. It refers to God and a monarch. Rulers in Iran and the Indian subcontinent assumed the titles of *khudawand*, or *dhil-e ilāhī*, (the shadow of Allah). Hence, *khudā* means a person who has political and state power. Pir Shams' statement,

"*use khudā kar mānē ji"* means that people accept a person with wealth and power as an absolute authority. This suggests the extensive power that people with religion could exercise, and on the other hand, the absence of power in the masses. It is ironic to envision a time when the meaning of the term *khudā* changes from divine to mundane and from spiritual to worldly.

Kal Yug is the time when materialism will take over human life and consciousness to such an extent that material indulgences will marginalize intellectual and spiritual matters. Spiritual impulses of human beings turn dormant and are desensitized to the extent that spiritual matters become foreign or irrelevant and symbols and practices lose meaning. These descriptors are very vivid signs for the hour of judgment.

Muhammad and His Progeny

The long narrative granth, *Moman Chetāmaṇī* (Caution for true believers) by Sayyid Imam Shah (15/16 CE) explicates the spiritual lineage of the Prophet. It describes the origin of the *Nūr* of Muhammad and Ali and the spiritual connection between the two. Prophet Muhammad is perceived as the manifestation of Guru Brahma. Muhammad is the last such manifestation is this form, though the Nūr of Muhammad had been perpetually manifested throughout ages to guide humanity. Hence, this meta-narrative goes back to the beginning of creation when Brahma manifested on earth to guide people.

Eji Te Alī Mahammad ek che
tena nām na juā juā vichār
Alī kīrtār Viṣaṇu kahīye
Nabī Muhammad Brahmaji no avatār — 117 (1924, 15)

Ali and Muhammad are one
Meditate on their names
Ali is like the avatar of Vishnu

Prophet Muhammad is like Brahma.

Eji Alī Nabī thī e satpaṅth chālīā
tene srevīe gupt apār
atharvedi ā paṅth kahīe
te to khojiā Kurān mīṅjar —162 (1924, 21)

From Ali and Nabi began the true creed
Practice it with utmost secrecy
This is the creed of unsettling times
Discovered from the depth of the Quran.

Pir Hasan Kabir al-Din in his granth*, Anaṅt Akhādo* also emphasizes the role of Muhammad and Ali and the continuation of the message of Muhammad through his progeny. The Pir says,

Ashāji dīn rachāvī rachanā kīdhī
kīyā hai dīn kīrtār ji
Rasūl thī je ālaj chālī
te Alī kero parivār — 376 (2006, 31)

Having created the order of religion
The creator established the religion
From the Messenger the progeny came about
through Ali's family.

Prophet Muhammad introduced the true creed. This creed leads a seeker to the recognition and knowledge of the truth. According to the ginanic literature, Islam and within it, the Ismail Tariqah, is a creed of the unsettling times of *kal yug*, the last period of the cycle. It is based on the inner meaning of the Quran; therefore, it provides something permanent, grounded in the truth of revelation. Pir Hasan Kabir al-Din further says,

Āshājī āl Nabī nī jug māṅhe āvī
tīn-kuṅ pūrā sirevo jī
āgal velā doelī āve
te māṅheṅ na reheve chit — 387 (2006, 31)

The progeny of the Prophet has come in this age
Serve them completely and devotedly
Difficult times will come ahead
But you won't have any worries then.

In *Moman Chetāmaṇī*, Imam Shah states,

Eji Anaṅt kalap anaṅt jug vahī gayā
te maṅhe jīv ughariā apār
ā kaljug maṅhe Alī Nabīji āvīyā
te paṇ karva jīvo ni saṁbhār — 164 (1924, 21)

Countless eons have passed,
In those eons innumerable souls were liberated
In this last era (*kal yug*) Ali and Nabi have arrived
In order to look after human souls.

The idea of service is not limited to the physical act of serving others. Contemporary Ismailis take this idea further and include any form of service whether it is through knowledge, time, material, or ideas. Furthermore, it goes back to the Quranic notion of *'abd*. *'Abd* is the state of being, demonstrated by Prophet Muhammad and Prophet Ibrahim. It is being close to Allah but also achieving the characteristics that make a person closer to Allah. The status of *'abd* can be considered as an ideal that a believer should aspire towards. For *murids* to take the journey toward this sublime goal, they must transform their thinking, behavior, and actions to reflect awareness and knowledge on the path.

Hence, when the *murid* faces difficulties, she or he would not worry. The terms '*āgal velā'* (the future moment) refers to that critical moment in the life hereafter when a person is answerable for his actions. At that critical moment, self-awareness and knowledge will assist the person to get through the difficult time.

Kalām-e Mawla (ed. Devraj, 1920/ VS 1976) belongs to a unique category of poetry. It focusses on the teachings of Hazrat Ali derived from his succession to the Prophet. It is attributed to Mawlana Ali, the first Imam, hence the

name *Kalām-e Mawla*, or *Speeches of Mawlana Ali*. According to Khoja Ismaili traditions, it is the translation in verse of Mawla Ali's sermons, firmans, and discourses. It is written in simple Urdu poetry, indicative of late 19th century crafting.

Allah ek jāno sirajan-hār
Mahamad jāno Allah kā nabī
Nabī jī ke pīche sāheb-e khilāfat
sach kar māno Murtazā 'Alī— 6

Acknowledge Allah is the only creator
Recognize Muhammad as His Prophet
After the Prophet, acknowledge the owner of succession
In truth is Murtaza Ali.

Sāchā Nabī hai dost khudā ka
aur sāchā to hai Khudāvaṅd āp
sāchā bolan-hār kuṅ panāh khudā kī
us kuṅ kuch na pahoṅche saṅtāp
sāchā kilāve dost khudā kā
sāche par sadā hai rahemat Rabb kī
sāchā khudā kuṅ hāzar bujhe
ke khudā hai dil meṅ khalakat sab kī — 7

The truthful Prophet is the friend of God,
And Allah Himself is indeed the Truth.
One who speaks the truth finds refuge in Allah,
No harm comes to him.
A truthful person is a friend of God
Providence bestows mercy on the truthful
The truthful person is always aware of the Divine Presence
For God resides in the hearts of all creation.

Tāzagī momine kī sāch se thī hay,
e kalām tuṅ sahī sach kar mān;
sāch so imān sāchā jāṇo,

Aur sāch sūn tāzagī nishān
Allah ek Mohammad Nabī,
Mowlā 'Alī hai Nabī jī ke ṭhām
is rīt imān lāo, karo kabūl, e hai ḥukam kalām — 8
(1920, 2)

Radiance on a devotee is from the truth,
Acknowledge this teaching as true,
Know that true faith is truth,
And truth is the token of vital force.
God is one, Muhammad is His Prophet,
And the Lord Ali is in the Prophet's place (successor).
In this fashion apply your faith, and accept it,
For such is the commandment of the speech (of Ali).

Kalām-e Mawla connects faith in Muhammad with the succession of Ali. The one who believes in Muhammad and Ali receives protection and *barakah* from them and achieves gnosis and spiritual wisdom through them.

In *Moman Chetāmaṇī,* Sayyid Imam Shah gives a description of Prophet Muhammad's status and meta-history and connects him to the idea of *avatār*, the incarnate divine teacher.

Eji Adhuro ocho kayāṅ nahīṅ
sarva sthān che ek sarajaṇ hār
te sevāne kāraṅe sarjiā
Gure Brahma ji Nabī Mahamad no avatār— 72

Who is not imperfect or incomplete here?
All have one creator
For the sake of all
Guru Brahma has taken Prophet Muhammad's manifestation.

Eji Nabī Mahamad Mustafa upāviā
eno chālyo che parivār
Satgur Brahma Mahamad ek che
teno karta te Viṣaṇu var dātār —73

Prophet Muhammad Mustafa has manifested

And his progeny continues
The true Master Brahma and Muhammad are one
He made Vishnu his son-in-law

Eji Brahma ji nā sut tene kahīe
je koi pāḷe dharam āchār
dān līye teto saphaḷ karī
tene māthe nahi reshe bhār —76 (1924, 10)

Those are the followers of Brahma
Who practice religion regularly
They earn their living and purify it
There won't be any burden on them

Moman Chetāmaṇī invites seekers to reflect upon the meaning behind the act of creation. In this world, all creation is imperfect; Prophet Muhammad appeared on earth to guide humanity and encourage them to take journey toward excellence. However, the guidance continues after the physical departure of the Prophet through his progeny. Ali ibn Abi Talib, who became his son-in-law, and continues the Prophet's message and guidance on the path. The Progeny of the Prophet impart the wisdom that adherents need to live their life. Wisdom and knowledge that come from the Prophet and his successors is legitimate and liberates the seekers.

In summary, the Pirs and their successors creatively composed narratives about the nature of prophetic knowledge, and especially the status of Prophet Muhammad, who concludes the last era through an educational and social change process that transforms individuals and the community.



Chapter 8

Prophet Muhammad In A Modern Muslim Community

Prophet Muhammad's Vision for a Modern Society

Looking back at the life of the Prophet, one can fully grasp Muhammad's intellectual prowess, political acumen, and cultural perspicacity. His dynamic personality had the power to change society. His ideas were far ahead of his time. He had the courage to implement his ideas enabling individual Muslims and the community to move forward and bring about political, economic, and cultural change in the world.

However, people pose questions about the relevance of Islam as a religion in modern times and the relevance of Muhammad's philosophy for contemporary society. Unlike other social reformers and philosophers in history, Muhammad's role is relevant in modern society not only for his ideas, but also for the methods and techniques he applied to introduce and implement change. Further, for Muslims, the inspiration that comes from his ideas and his persona is invaluable to find solutions to contemporary challenges.

In his lifetime, Muhammad used unorthodox methods and approaches to the problems of his time. It is important to use his ideas and methods to find solutions to present

day problems rather than to just repeat his words verbatim or convert his revolutionary ideas into dogma.

In modern times, Ismaili Imams have demonstrated, through their ideas and actions, how Prophet Muhammad's ideas can be a source of inspiration to apply avant-garde techniques in seeking solutions to problems of modern society. The Imams' strategies to respond to challenges demonstrate that Islam with its humanistic ethics is relevant for modern society and a powerful resource to address complex challenges that Muslims and other communities currently face, especially when other sources of knowledge fall short of adequately responding to such challenges.

One example from Muhammad's life is his saying, which emphasized that all Muslims, women and men, should seek knowledge wherever it is found. Comparing it with the importance of the intellect in today's knowledge-driven technological society, the Present (*Hāḍar*) Imam encourages his followers and other Muslims to seek knowledge. The Imam also demonstrates this wisdom through his own actions by implementing programs for educational, health, economic, and cultural development of societies that are actively engaged to improve the quality of life for all humankind.

Prophet Muhammad's Inspiration for the Aga Khan III

The 48th Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah, the Aga Khan III (d. 1957), was the first Imam of the modern era. After becoming the Imam at the age of eight, he traveled extensively and engaged with rulers, kings, and queens all over the world, building global contexts within and outside the community. He assumed the role of historian and narrator of the Muslim plight in a period of global change. He explained his role to the faithful and he defined Islam and his particular role to the world.

In his book, *Memoirs of Aga Khan* in the chapter titled "Islam, the religion of my ancestors," he succinctly

describes the historical context of the emergence of Islam and also alludes to key principles of Islam and Ismailism. He states,

> In the seventh century of the Christian era, there was a rapid and brilliant new flowering of humanity's capacity and desire for adventure and discovery in the realms of both spirit and intellect. That flowering began in Arabia; its origin and impetus were given to it by my Holy ancestor, the Prophet Mohammed, and we know it by the name of Islam (1954, 22).

In the above statement, the Aga Khan III describes spirit and intellect as pillars of Islam in the Ismaili interpretation. He alludes to philosophical and mystical movements that emerged after the Prophet when Muslims devoted themselves to search for knowledge leading to scientific explorations and philosophical debates. Similarly, Muslim societies produced mystics who investigated into the realm of spirit. They produced a tremendous amount of literature in both the spiritual and the intellectual fields.

The Aga Khan III attributes these achievements to the person of the Holy Prophet. For him, the Prophet was the catalyst for change in Arab society and it was his wisdom and policies for knowledge and spiritual progress that motivated Muslims to follow the path of seeking knowledge and spiritual enlightenment. The Aga Khan III also establishes his link with the Prophet wherefrom he draws his legitimacy and authority. He explains the nature of the Prophet's authority by stating,

> The Prophet Mohammed had two sources of authority, one religious that was the essential one of his life, and the other secular, which, by the circumstances and accidents of his career,

became joined to his essential and divinely inspired authority in religion (1954, 24).

The Aga Khan III makes an important distinction between the two roles of the Prophet,

1) His role as the Prophet of Allah was essentially a religious role.
2) His secular role as a political and community leader was by accident in the sense that circumstances forced him to make decisions and take up worldly responsibilities.

The Aga Khan III considered the second type of responsibilities as non-essential and he distinguishes them as the secular set of responsibilities. It is also indicative of his own dual responsibilities as the Imam of the Ismaili community. In his religious responsibilities, he provided his followers spiritual guidance. It was obligatory for his followers to follow his guidance, in the same way, as it was incumbent upon Muslims to follow the religious guidance of the Prophet. However, the Prophet or Imam's guidance in worldly matters is advice that theoretically a follower may choose not to follow. As Allah has given all human beings intelligence, they are capable of making decisions, whereas religious ethics and guidance are obligations.

Aga Khan III further explained that the group of Muslims, namely Sunni Muslims, believed that "the Prophet's religious authority came to an end at his death and he appointed no successor to his secular authority" (1954, 24). This is the marked distinction of the Prophet's role as understood by Ismailis. According to the 48th Imam, although Sunni Muslims believed that Prophet's religious function ended with his death and secular responsibilities were taken up by his companions, for Ismailis and Shias in general, both these functions, religious and secular, continued in the person and the institution of the Imam. He postulates that since only Allah

assigns religious authority, no one could claim it except the one who is designated by the Prophet. He states, “No one had the authority to succeed to the religious supremacy, which depended on direct Divine inspiration, because the Prophet Mohammed and the Koran declared definitely that he was the final messenger of God, the Absolute” (1954, 24). In the modern period of the Ismaili Tariqah, the belief in the finality of Prophecy and the continuity of divine guidance has not changed. Hence, the Imam, as the designee of the Prophet, continues to interpret the divine message and intercedes on behalf of believers as the Prophet did.

Another aspect of Prophecy, which distinguishes Islam from other religions, is the acceptance of divine guidance being available to other ‘nations’ as well. This is a cosmopolitan view of religion. It does not claim monopoly over the truth and does not consider Islam as the only path to salvation. In fact, Islam is a mystical religion, and it envisages that religion leads to divine light. The Aga Khan III, asserting the existence of other messengers among other nations, states,

> Muslims indeed know no limitation merely to the Prophets of Israel; they are ready to admit that there were similar divinely inspired messengers in other countries -- Gautama Buddha, Shri Krishna, and Shri Ram in India, Socrates in Greece, the wise men of China, and many other sages and saints among peoples and civilizations, trace of which we have lost. Thus, man's soul has never been left without an especially inspired messenger from the Universal Soul that sustains, embraces, and is the universe (1954, 26).

The Aga Khan brings the idea home that all human beings are given responsibilities to do good, and to avoid ignorance and indulgence in materialism. However, ultimately, their purpose in life is to be one with the

divine. In an engaging passage, he describes how all human beings carry a spark of divine light. He further states, "Everyone should strive his best to see that this spark be not extinguished but rather developed to that full 'Companionship-on-High,' which was the vision expressed in the last words of the Prophet on his deathbed, the vision of that blessed state which he saw clearly awaiting him" (1954, 27). Thus, the Holy Prophet ascertained that the ultimate goal of human search was to be in union with the divine light. These examples exemplify the centrality of Prophet Muhammad's life in the Ismaili Tariqah.

Karim Aga Khan and Prophetic Ethics

The Aga Khan III appointed his grandson, Karim (b. 1936) as his successor, stating that he would be the Imam of the Atomic Age. Karim Aga Khan, the 49th Imam of Ismaili Muslims often goes back to his roots and his ancestor, Prophet Muhammad to explain his role and his ideas. When asked in an interview about his role, he stated that the mission of the institution of Imamate "is to guarantee quality of life and to interpret the faith" (*La Force de la Sagesse*, 2005). The Aga Khan IV (2005) further elaborates his responsibility as the Imam in the Ismaili tradition by saying,

> To begin with, it is an inherited role of spiritual leadership. As you may know, the Ismailis are the only Muslim community that have been led by a living, hereditary Imam in direct descent from Prophet Muhammad.

The Aga Khan IV explains his role as the Imam of the Ismaili community and particularly emphasizes the parallel existence of his dual roles, as a spiritual and religious leader and a leader in the social arena. He stresses,

> That spiritual role however, does not imply a separation from practical responsibilities. In fact, for Muslims the opposite is true: the spiritual and material worlds are inextricably connected. Leadership in the spiritual realm — for all Imams, whether they are Sunni or Shia — implies responsibility in worldly affairs; a calling to improve the quality of human life (Jodidi Lecture, 2015).

However, Karim Aga Khan never identifies a political role for himself. His interpretation of Islam as not having a separation between religious and worldly affairs is quite unlike those who propagate the Islamization of knowledge that necessitates the conversion of political and social institutions into a so-called Islamic mold.

The Aga Khan IV interprets Islam as a cosmopolitan ethic that plays an important role in governing personal lives within a broader, diverse, global, and humanistic world ethic. He encourages his followers to acquire contemporary knowledge and he particularly encourages them to use that knowledge for the benefit of humanity. His major efforts are devoted to raise consciousness about the Presence of Allah in their daily lives and make them understand that their intellect, knowledge, and material wealth are all gifts from Allah, and therefore, they should be grateful and humble for these blessings and grace.

Throughout his Imamate, the Aga Khan IV has been preoccupied with his followers' economic, cultural, and social progress. In his tenure as the Imam, he offers spiritual and religious guidance. However, his major preoccupation is to address some of the pressing issues that his community faces.

During the last five decades, he successfully built relations with his followers in Central Asian countries that were part of the former Soviet Union, China, and Afghanistan. He dealt with crises in Africa, especially in Uganda, where Asians were expelled in the 1970s, the

migration of Ismailis in the 1971 war in East Pakistan that resulted in the coming into being of the new country Bangladesh, the emergence of newly established Central Asian nations with the breakdown of the Soviet Bloc and more recently, the wars in Afghanistan and Syria.

He has expanded the range of institutions working in developing societies in the field of community development, education, economy, and health. He works with governments of diverse political persuasions, and countries at various stages of political and economic development.

Most importantly, he deals with the perception of Islam in the West. Historically, western countries perceived Islam and the Prophet in an unfavorable light going back to Muslim conquests of parts of Europe. Since early history, propaganda against Islam and Prophet Muhammad has continued. It has become normative to apply different standards to judge Islam and the Prophet versus western standards used to examine their own beliefs and their own religious figures. After the 9/11 incident, Western antagonism increased and Muslims in general and their leadership were defensive, and put in the position to explain their beliefs and values to an audience that is hostile and has deep-rooted prejudices. Islam and Muslims are projected as a backward, violent, and uncivilized group of people who do not appreciate democratic or modern values.

Prejudices are so widespread that intelligentsia, academics, and journalist are also not free from them, and they ask questions that reflect their ignorance about Islam. Western societies also have a skewed view of their own realities. In replying to a journalist about the relationship between democracy and Islam, His Highness Aga Khan IV stated, "I read that Islam is in conflict with democracy. Yet I must tell you that as a Muslim, I am a democrat not because of Greek or French thought, but primarily because of principles that go back 1,400 years (to Prophet

Muhammad)" (The Star, 2005). In another interview, answering a similar question, he states, "These are the principles (democratic principles) underlying my religion. During the Prophet's life (peace be upon him), there was a systematic consultative political process" (*Spiegel*, 2006).

For the Aga Khan IV, Prophet Muhammad laid the foundations of a society that nurtured democratic principles and values in which individuals had participation in societal processes. The Aga Khan consistently goes back to the early history of Islam to explain his conviction that the Islamic message and Prophet's wisdom provide inspiration for Muslims to find a solution during any period in the history of humanity.

While accepting the Charter of the Aga Khan University in Karachi, Pakistan in 1983, he stated, "In Islamic belief, knowledge is two-fold. There is that revealed through the Holy Prophet (s.a.s.) and that which man discovers by virtue of his own intellect. Nor do these two involve any contradiction, provided man remembers that his own mind is itself the creation of God. Without this humility, no balance is possible." In his speech, he defines the two-fold nature of knowledge. He emphasizes that there is no conflict between revelation and rational knowledge in Islam. One of his passions is to explain the central role of the intellect in Islam to his followers and to the world. He considers the misguided views about Islamic teachings being in conflict with reason to be based on ignorance and misperception.

For the Aga Khan IV, the search for knowledge and the use of the intellect in spiritual and worldly matters are part of the faith of Islam. It is a 1400 years' old tradition in Muslim society. Often, Muslims are appalled to see that Western society is so ignorant about Islam, yet it still does not hesitate to form opinions and pass judgments. The Aga Khan seems to be disturbed by this frame of discourse. Pope Benedict in the Regensburg Lecture (2006) made a statement that Islam as a religion does not encourage the

use of reason. The Pope's statement was based on a medieval writer's view that Islam or Muslims do not have regard for reason. The Aga Khan disagreed with such statements.

Hence, when the Aga Khan refers to the Holy Quran and the life of the Prophet, he does not advocate replicating the past. Rather, he argues for drawing inspiration from the teachings of the Quran and the Prophet and using one's God-given intellect to seek solutions to the modern-day problems. Speaking at the *Seerat* (Biography of the Prophet) Conference in 1976, he identifies the challenges that Post-Colonial Muslim societies are facing. He states,

> Thus, it is my profound conviction that Islamic Society in the years ahead will find that our traditional concept of time, a limitless mirror in which to reflect on the eternal, will become shrinking cage, an invisible trap from which fewer and fewer will escape.

In this profound philosophical statement, he argues that the traditional concept of time provided an infinite perspective on the cycle of life. The soul's quest to return to its origin will not exist anymore.

His prognostication holds true today, a few decades of his speech. The advancement of technology with the Internet and social media have changed our concept of time and space. People are preoccupied with surfing the Internet, communicating through smart phones, and struggling to maintain their economic needs. Hence, human consciousness has transformed in ways whereby the idea of the 'eternal' and the spiritual holds limited allure for people.

Another aspect of social and cultural change is that the same technology, transportation links, and economic interdependencies have changed the once huge distant globe into a small community of people with diverse

cultural traits and often-competing interests. There is competition for resources but also competition for cultural ascendency and control. Traditional values are diminishing, and foreign values are encroaching into traditional societies. Cultures that have enormous power and resources available tend to overwhelm traditional societies and cultures. The Aga Khan alludes to this cultural threat. He states,

> The anchors of moral behavior appear to have dragged to such depths that they no longer hold firm the ship of life. What was once wrong is now simply unconventional, and for the sake of individual freedom must be tolerated. What is tolerated soon becomes accepted. Contrarily, what was once right is now viewed as outdated, old-fashioned and is often the target of ridicule. In the face of this changing world, which was once a universe to us and is now no more than an overcrowded island, … surrounded by a foreign fleet of cultural and ideological ships, which have broken loose (Aga Khan, 1976).

He indicates that Muslim societies are facing a changing world in which their values and ideas might be rejected, ridiculed, and marginalized as outdated. Foreign ideas will influence the Muslims world, and unless they prepare themselves for it, will impose change on which they may not have control. He suggests a response to these challenges from the Holy Quran and the example of the Prophet (Aga Khan, 1976). He also holds the conviction that these sources available to Muslims will offer solutions to their contemporary problems. Hence, he notes, “We are blessed that the answers drawn from these sources guarantee that neither now, nor at any time in the future will we be going astray” (Aga Khan, 1976). He further argues that Prophet Muhammad’s life provides fundamental guidelines that enable our intellects to find

solutions to pressing modern problems. He specifically identifies characteristics of the Prophet that could assist us in facing the challenges of modernity. He states,

> His example of integrity, loyalty, honesty, generosity both of means and of time, his solicitude for the poor, the weak and the sick, his steadfastness in friendship, his humility in success, his magnanimity in victory, his simplicity, his wisdom in conceiving new solutions for problems, which could not be solved by traditional methods, without affecting the fundamental concepts of Islam, surely all these are foundations which, … must enable us to conceive what should be a truly modern and dynamic Islamic society in the years ahead (1976).

The Aga Khan highlights the ethics that the Prophet practiced and promoted in his social justice endeavors and the values that kept him humble in success and victory. However, more importantly, his wisdom to find "new solutions for problems, which could not be solved by traditional methods, without affecting th fundamental concepts of Islam" (1976), meaning that the Prophet took risks and tried out new ways of finding solutions to difficult issues of his time. He envisages that modern Muslim societies anchored on their traditions and values can partake in the benefits of modern societies, their knowledge, and advancements. Hence, the Aga Khan sees that Prophet Muhammad's character, wisdom, and his approaches to addressing the issues of his time, still can inspire, guide, and provide an ethical knowledge base for being a Muslim in a modern society.

GLOSSARY

Amr (Divine Command): Refers to the *kalimah,* the Word, *kun* by which the 1st Intellect came into being.

Amr wa nahi: Religiously prescribed acts, practices, and prohibitions. From the Quranic reference (3:104), *al 'amr bi-l maʿrūf wa-n nahy ʿan al munkar, Enjoining what is good and forbidding what is reprehensible.*

Asās (lit. foundation): The successor of a nāṭīq who teaches the *ta'wīl* — the esoteric meaning of the revelation. He is succeeded by a series of seven Imams. Ali ibn Abi Talib was the *Asās* to Muhammad.

Al-ʻālam al-dīn: The world of religion indicates the religion that is preached by the Ismaili daʻwah.

Al-ʻālam al-ʻulwī: The celestial world.

Al-ʻālam al-suflī: The sublunary world; the material world.

Al-ʻaql (awwal or kulli): The intellect, first or universal.

Bāb (lit. gate): The highest-ranking member of the Ismaili daʻwah hierarchy. In the pre-Fatimid period, the *Bāb* was regional head in charge of the daʻwah. The *Bāb* would rank next to the Imam.

Bandagi: Being in the state of servanthood. In the Indian-Pak subcontinent, it also means, occupied in ʻ*ibādat* (act of meditation).

Barakah: Bliss, abundance, grace, plenty; The presence of the spiritual master bring bliss and abundance in one's life.

Bāṭin: The inner, esoteric dimension of the revelation and the Sharīʻah.

Dā'ī pl. *du'āt* (lit. one who summons or invites). A member of the Ismaili da'wah who invites people to the Ismaili cause.

Dā'ī al-du'āt: The highest rank in the da'wah organization in the Fatimid period.

Dātār: provider, caretaker, and protector.

Da'wah: The organization of the Ismaili mission with its hierarchy of *dā'īs,* who preach Ismaili beliefs and propagate the religio-political ideals of the *tariqah*.

Dawr (lit. period): The cycle of cosmic history.

Dawr al-adwār: The cycle of the cycles. Refers to the cycle of the *Qā'im*.

Dawr al-kabīr: The great cycle. The cycle that comprised the period of seven *Nāṭiq.*

Dawr al-kashf: The cycle of revelation. The period in which exoteric laws are relaxed and esoteric sciences are introduced. The period of revelation alternates with the period of occultation.

Dawr al-ṣaghīr (The small cycle): A cycle consists of a *Nāṭiq*, *Asās,* and seven Imams.

Dawr al-satr (The period of Occultation): The period in which the esoteric sciences are silenced and Sharī'ah is imposed. The practice of exoteric aspects of religion becomes obligatory.

Devtā: Celestial beings; could be translated as angels.

Fayḍ (benefit): the pouring out of (spiritual) benefits by each upper rank to the lower rank in the celestial and terrestrial hierarchies.

Ginān: From the Sanskrit *jñan,* knowledge. Refers to the Ismaili literature produced by Ismaili preachers in the Indian sub-continent. It is mostly in poetry form.

Gupt: Hidden; concealed; it is equivalent to the Arabic term *satr* or the word *taqīyah* — the faith that is practiced is concealed from outsiders.

Ḥadd pl. *ḥudūd* (lit. limit, or rank): Defines the role and function of each member of the da‘wah.

Ḥujjah (lit., proof): Refers to the high-ranking member of the da‘wah, who was in charge of a geographical region. This term also refers to Prophets or Imams, who stand among humankind as a proof of God.

Ibdā‘ (Origination): The process of coming into being from the *mubdi‘* (the source of origination).

Imām (lit. leader): According to Ismaili belief, after the demise of a prophet, Imams succeed him to continue the mission of the Prophet. They have the responsibility of interpreting the divine message.

Inbi‘āth: The process of emanation from the Intellect, which brings the Universal Soul into existence.

Jadd: A spiritual power, mediating between the spiritual and the physical worlds and identified with the Angel Gabriel.

Jazīrah (lit. island): Various regions of the da‘wah. Usually, there are twelve *ḥujjahs.* Sometimes, twenty-four are mentioned, twelve for the day and twelve for the night, which probably refers to the exoteric and esoteric functions of the da‘wah.

Kalimah (or *Kalma*; The Sacred Word): The intermediary between *al-Mubdi‘* and the Intellect. Also, the declaration of faith recited by Muslims.

Al-khalq al- thāni (The second creation): A title given to the Universal Soul.

Khayāl: A spiritual power, mediating between spiritual and physical worlds and identified with Angel Israfil.

Kunī, Qadar: The female and male creative principles in early Ismaili cosmological mythos.

Mahdī (lit. guided one): A person who will appear in the end of the prophetic cycle and fulfill humankind's eschatological and religio-political expectations.

Mawālid: The kingdoms of four elements; water, earth, air and fire.

Māyā: (Sanskrit) meaning illusion or magic, it also means power and wisdom.

Mubda‘ (*awwal*): The Originated Being. Refers to the Intellect.

Mubdi‘ (The Originator): Refers to the Godhead, from whom the Intellect originated.

Man: (Gujrati and Hindi) heart, seat of human desire that needs to be controlled.

Mutimm: A title given to a Prophet or an Imam who completes a cycle. In this sense, each Nāṭiq, such as Muhammad and every seventh Imam, such as Muhammad ibn Ismail is a *mutimm*.

Nafs: soul.

Al-nafs al-kull (The Universal Soul) emanates from the first Intellect.

Naqīb, pl. *nuqabā’:* The term in Ismaili context means “officer,” “person in charge.” There were twelve *nuqabā‘* in the da‘wah. It appears that the term was later equivalent to the position of *ḥujjah.*

Nāṭiq pl. *nuṭaqā’* (Enunciator Prophet). A Prophet who introduces a new sharī‘ah and inaugurates a new cycle. In Ismaili Cosmology, the *nāṭiq* is the terrestrial pole of the Intellect, the *sābiq*.

Nirālā: Unique, incomparable.

Paṅth: Creed or community of believers.

Pāp: Transgression; A person who does not follow a community’s code of conduct transgresses.

Pustak: Scriptures, books.

Qā’im: The Resurrector. The seventh nāṭiq, who will not bring the Sharī‘ah but will reveal its inner meaning, inaugurate the cycle of revelation and fulfill messianic expectations.

Qiyāmah (The Resurrection): The time when the *Qā'im* will dislodge the da'wah and the purpose of preaching would have been achieved by the establishment of the ideal moral order. The Sharī'ah will be lifted and the truth concealed behind the revelation will be disclosed by the Imam *Qā'im*.

Rafīq: Companion, a friend, the term in Islamic mysticsm indicates an intimate relationship with Allah.

Rājā: Ruler, master.

Raja' (lit. return): According to the Shi'i doctrine of *raja',* the death of an *Imam* is rendered void and his return is expected sometime in the future.

Sābiq: The One who precedes, refers to the First Intellect.

Ṣāḥib al-kashf (The master of revelation): Refers to the *Qā'im*, who will reveal the inner meaning of the revelation.

Sat-panth (The true path or creed); an equivalent to the Quranic term, *ṣirāt al-mustaqīm* (the straight path)*,* or Sharī'ah (the path). It used in ginans to represent the Ismaili path. Currently, it is also used to refer to the splinter group who follow Sayyid Imam Shah.

Shabada: The Word, *al-ism al-ā'ẓam,* given to a disciple (initiated follower) to meditate upon.

Sharī'ah: The religious path that comprises of laws, rituals and other practices and obligations of the faith.

Sharī'ah ẓāhir: The literal meaning and exoteric aspect of the divine revelation and the Sharī'ah.

Shifāyat: Intercession, healing. Prophet Muhammad intervenes on behalf of believers on Judgment Day and brings relief and healing for souls in trouble.

Tālī: The "following" or "succeeding" refers to the Universal Soul.

Tā'līm: Authoritative teachings; According to the Ismaili belief, the acquisition of religious knowledge and higher esoteric truths

is possible only through a teacher who is divinely ordained to do so, meaning the Imam of the time and his designated teachers.

Tanzīl: The revelation; refers to the external form of revelation.

Ta'wīl: Allegorical exegesis refers to the method, as well as the inner meaning of the divine message arrived through the process.

Ta'yīd: Support or assistance, refers to divine power given to the Prophet or Imam to aid him in his mission.

Ul al-'aẓm: The Prophet with resolution, refers to a *Nāṭiq* who abrogates the Sharī'ah of the previous Prophet and introduces the new one.

Waṣī, pl. *awṣiya'*: The Successor of the *Nāṭīq*. He is considered as the terrestrial correspondent of the *Tālī.* His function is to reveal the esoteric meaning (*ta'wīl*) of the divine message.

Waṣīlo: From Arabic *waṣala*, to reach, reach out; the Sindhi adaption as *Waṣīlo* means the agency for intercession. Reaching out to assist in difficult times, i.e. seek Ali as *Waṣīlo*.

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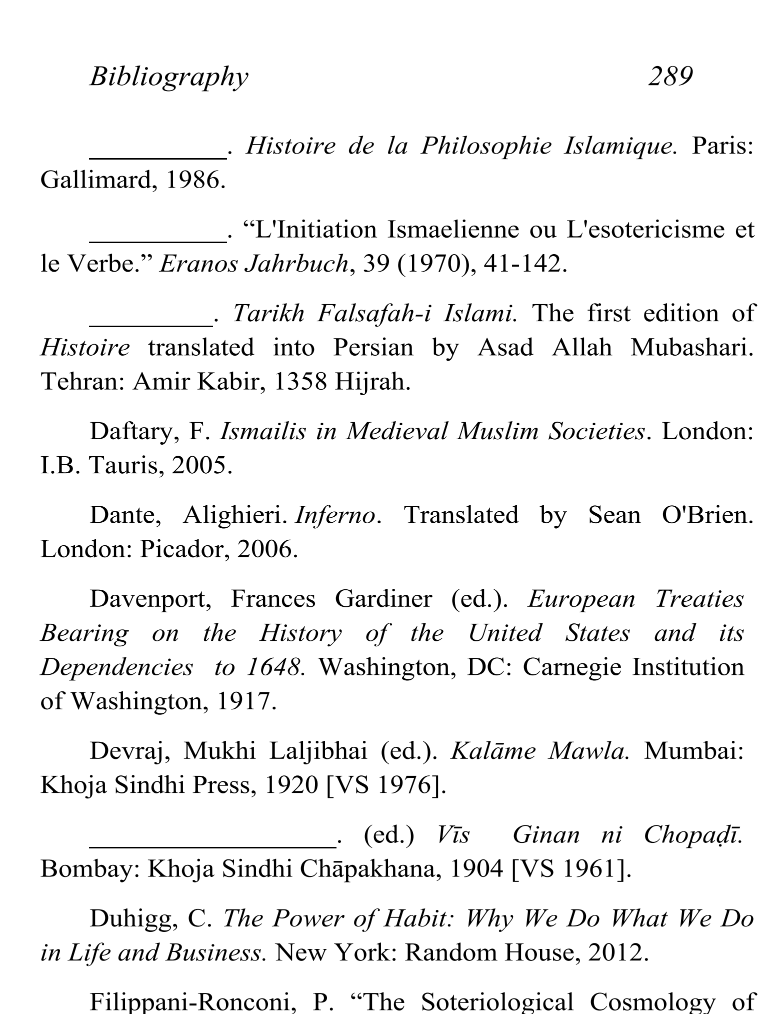
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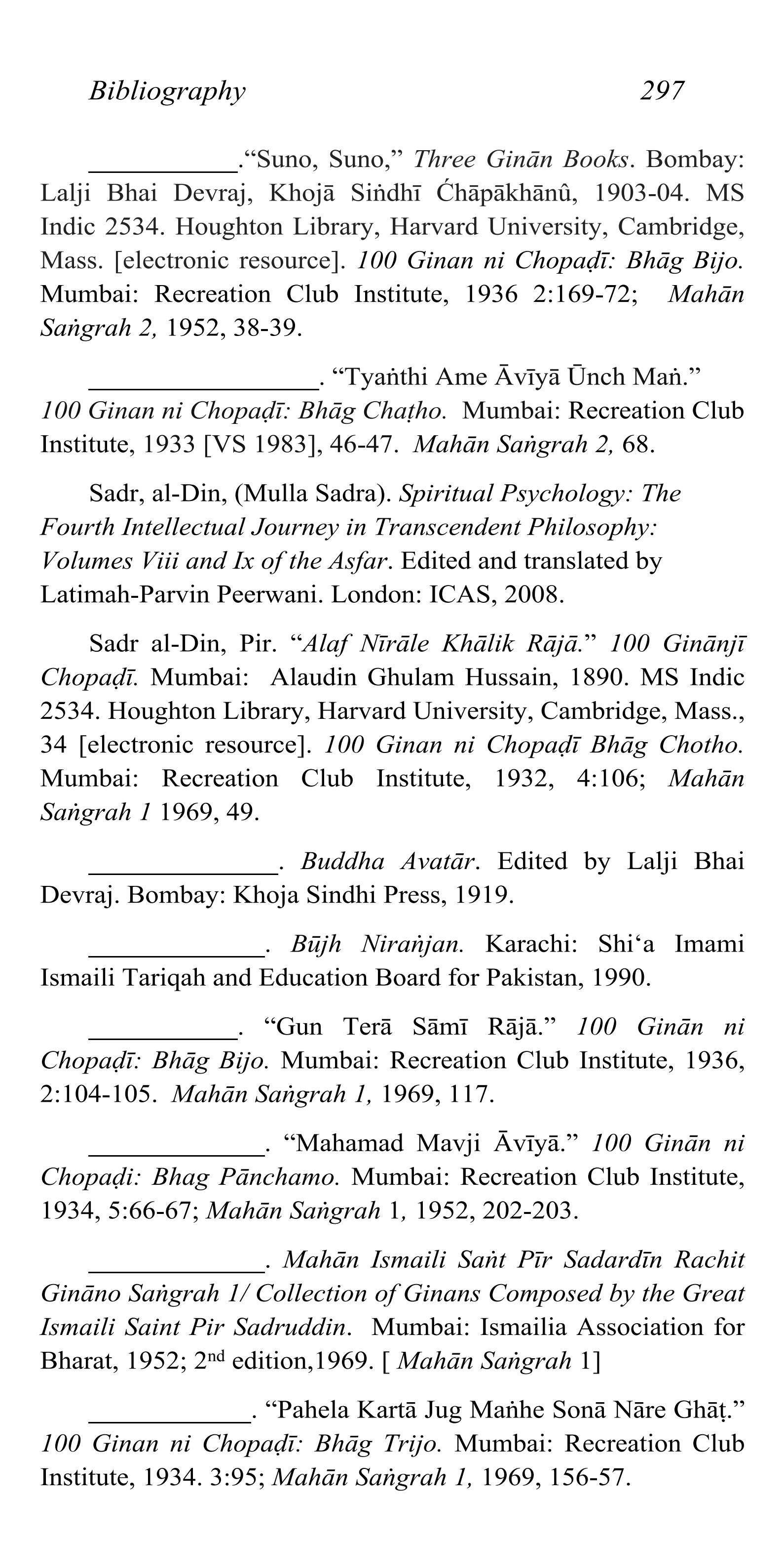
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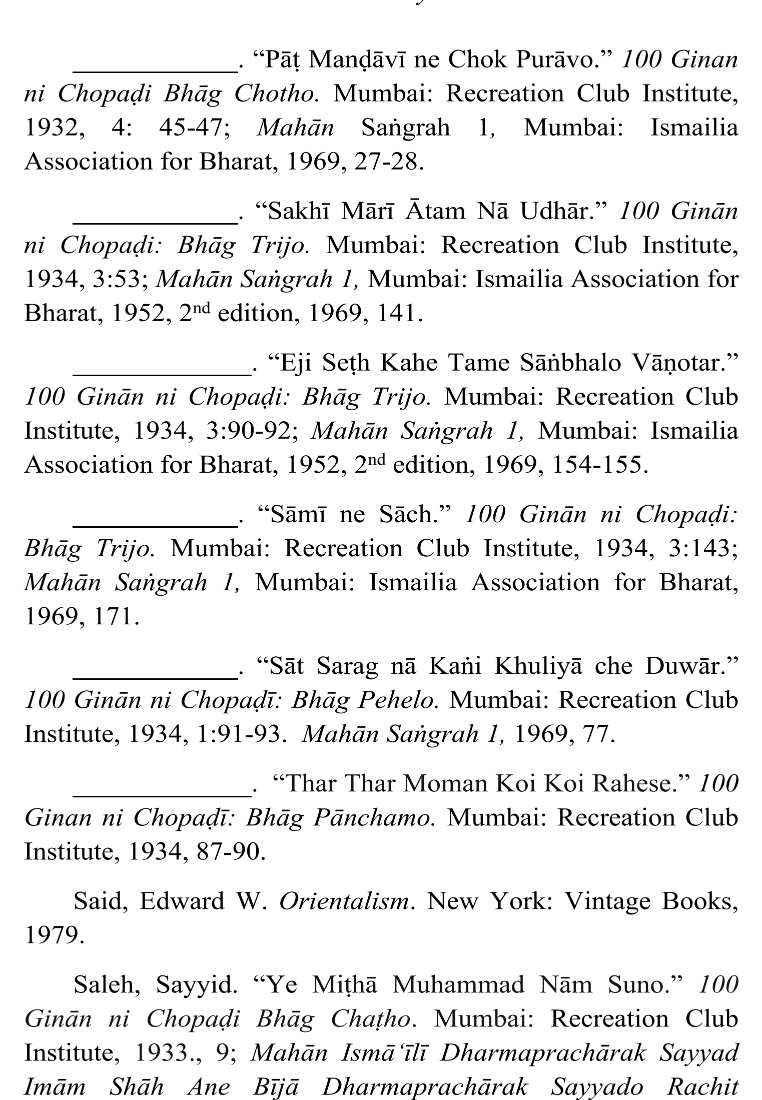
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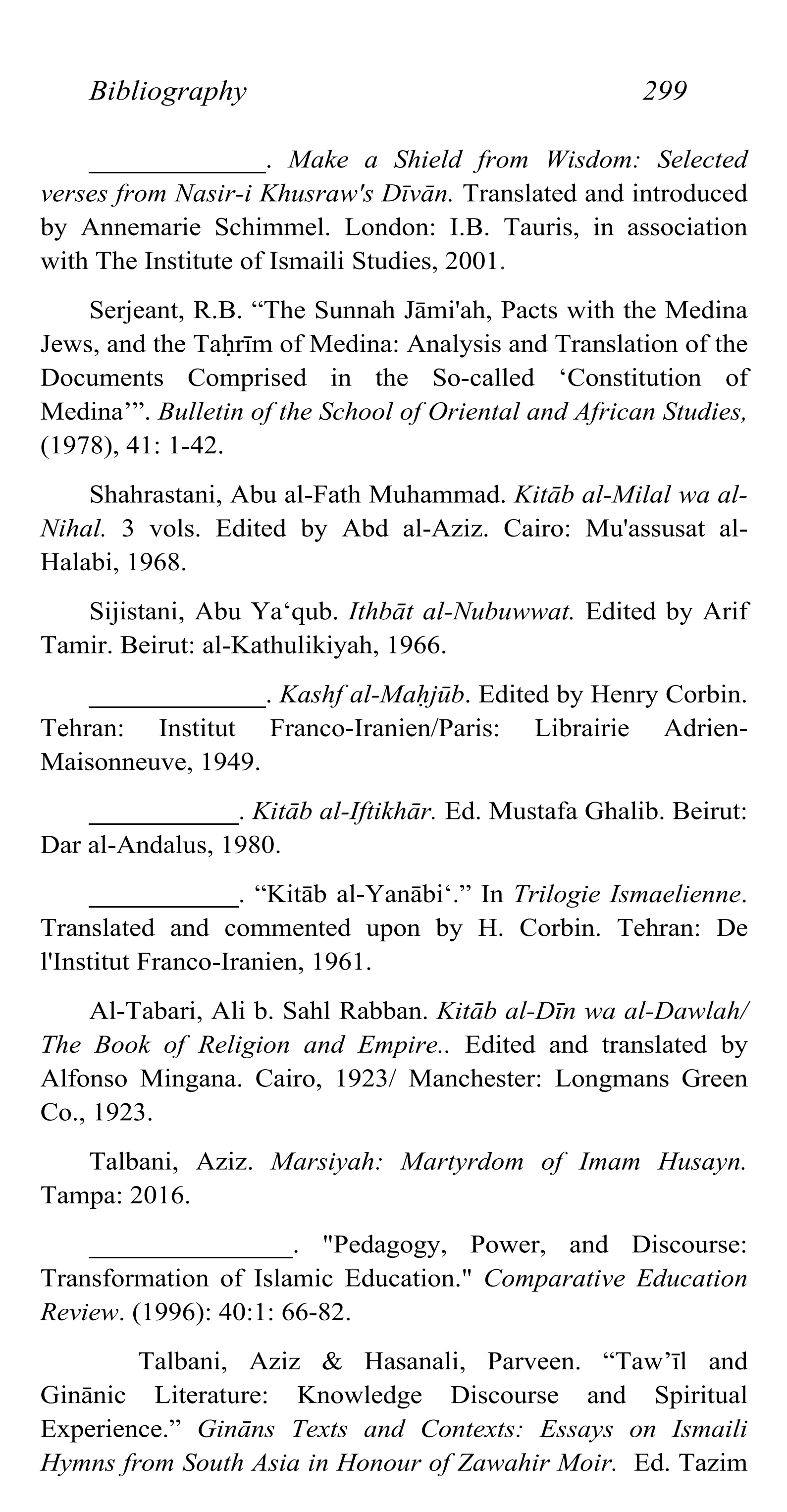
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